



# Birchandra Public Library

---

Class No. 817.5

Book No. 5-649.

Accn. No. 4680

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Library Form No 4

This book was taken from the Library on the date  
last stamped. It is returnable within 14 days.

20.5.81	2.8.04		
(4721)	13.15.02	(S)	
1.4.81			
8961			
18/8/82			
5017			
23.11.83			
13.9.673			

CTTI-10,000





*The World,  
The Flesh,  
and H. Allen Smith*

*The World,*

*The Flesh,  
and  
H. Allen Smith*

Edited and with an Introduction by

BERGEN EVANS

LONDON

ARTHUR BARKER

*First published in Great Britain 1915*

*Books by H Allen Smith*

SMITH'S LONDON JOURNAL  
THE COMPLEAT PRACTICAL JOKER  
LO, THE FORMER EGYPTIAN'  
LOST IN THE HORSE LATITUDES  
LARKS IN THE POPCORN  
WE WENT THATAWAY  
MR ZIP

*The above is not a complete list of Mr Smith's works,  
but those titles available in Great Britain*

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
MORRISON AND GIBB LIMITED, LONDON AND EDINBURGH

# *Contents*

INTRODUCTION	vii
THE MIDWEST	1
FAMILY MATTERS	17
BRIEF COURSE IN JOURNALISM	41
THE HUMAN ANIMAL	65
CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER	101
THE WRITING TRADE	121
MEN AT WORK	145
NEW YORK	165
HOLLYWOOD	187
THE WILD WEST	205
LIFE IN THE SUBURBS	225
MAN'S BEST FRIENDS	245
THE SPORTING LIFE	259
NOTES ON THE ENGLISH	275
ODDS & ODDS	291



## INTRODUCTION

The peculiar humor which is recognized as characteristically American might more accurately be called Midwestern, since it was not really heard until the western migration spilled over the Alleghenies and peopled the plains that stretched to the Mississippi and beyond. The Yankee ("built on hard luck and codfish") was already established as a comic rascal, and a caricature of the stolid Dutchman was a stock amusement, but both of these were European types merely transplanted to the colonies.

The Midwestern frontier, however, was something new in human experience and produced new responses. The carefully woven fabric of illusion that constitutes much of civilization offered little protection in forest, swamp and prairie. Life in the clearings, in the log cabins and the malarial river bottoms was hard, monotonous and depressing. The vast discrepancy between the vision that had brought them there and the actuality they found on arriving must have been almost unendurable to the settlers and laughter their only relief. Mark Twain, who as a child saw the last of the Midwestern frontier, said, "The secret source of humor is not joy but sorrow; there is no humor in heaven."

The frontier was not heaven, though; there you laughed or died. And since the pioneers were too tough to die, they laughed. Their laughter was often uncouth, often boastful, bombastic and irreverent. But it was a challenge and an assurance of ultimate triumph. Much of the old "tall talk" now seems turgid and forced, too

thin a veneer over the underlying violence and desolation; but it flowered into a great literature and colored, and still colors, everyday American life with a saving sense of absurdity. "All modern men are descended from wormlike creatures," says Will Cuppy, "but it shows more on some people."

What other part of the earth can match the Midwest's list of humorists—from Davey Crockett through Mark Twain, Finley Peter Dunne, George Ade, Booth Tarkington, Kin Hubbard, Damon Runyon—merely to skim the surface—to Don Marquis, Ring Lardner, Charles Morton and James Thurber? And these are only "literary," a conspicuous eddy in the immense stream of talking humorists, of whom Lincoln is the greatest example and Will Rogers the best known. Red Skelton, Clifton Webb, Joe E. Brown, Bobby Clark, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, Jack Benny, Bob Hope, Burr Tilstrom, Herb Shriner—they're all Midwesterners, and there are scores of others. The whistle stops teem with them, be-gallused and belligerent, waiting expectorantly for some smart-aleck Easterner upon whom to break the vials of their scorn. "We're all funny," said one of George Ade's brothers; "George just writes it down."

Indeed, it is obligatory to be a wit in the prairie hamlets. "If you think before you speak," Ed Howe ruefully complained, "the other fellow gets in his joke first." Most of the local humor is corny, but it's shrewd, earthy and droll, burlesquing in its extravagance the pompousness of our national self-esteem, deflating false pretensions, gilding hardship with a saving grace and asserting equality with an irresistible impudence.

H. Allen Smith is as Midwestern as they come. He was born in Little Egypt, at McLeansboro, Illinois, something over forty-five years ago. His family, a large one, moved to Decatur and thence to Defiance, Ohio, before finally settling, or at least falling exhausted, in Huntington, Indiana. Young Allen worked on a farm and in a barbershop as a shoeshine boy and general handy man. In Huntington he served as an altar boy, praying fervently that prominent members of the parish might die, since altar boys received cash gratuities for their assistance at funerals. But this



pious career was terminated abruptly when he undertook, on one occasion, to "brighten up" the Mass by executing double genuflections, clinking the cruets and swooping and caracoling about, in the execution of his duties, in an highly original but unacceptable manner.

He abandoned school after the eighth grade and, thus disencumbering himself from the stultification that passes for education in most small towns, was free to devote his spare time to reading while working as a reporter on the local paper. The itch to write was upon him, however, and he composed and circulated an imaginative piece entitled "Stranded on a Davenport." It had a vast sub rosa success, but Huntington's justice of the peace adjudged it to be "lewd, licentious, obscene and lascivious." Smith was fined \$22.50, ostracized and, worst of all, ordered to study the Scriptures under the supervision of the city attorney. Doubting the soundness of this eminent theologian's exegesis, however, the young author feared for his immortal soul and fled the village.

For the next twenty years he was a wandering newspaperman, what a century before would have been called a journeyman printer, a career that has trained more American humorists than any other. He worked in Louisville, Florida, Tulsa and Denver as a reporter and columnist. It was from the never-ending farce of life in a newspaper office that he received his real education, from that and from books that he read after he was old enough to know what he was reading. Finally, and inevitably, he gravitated to New York, where he was hired by the United Press as a by-line feature writer, and here he remained for five years, until 1905.

Then to the *World-Telegram* where—after distinguishing himself by a fresh treatment of the weather reports—he became established as a feature interviewer, one of the best in the country.

It was an arduous life. As Smith and dozens of his long-suffering fellow reporters have pointed out, the interview is one of the most sterile of modern column-filling devices. Anyone who has traveled abroad, begotten sextuplets, sat on a flagpole or inherited several millions is, by sole virtue of that fact, exalted into the chair of wisdom and besought for opinions on all problems of the day.

Often, of course, the celebrity has no opinions at all, is incapable of forming any or even of understanding the questions asked. A male of moderate intelligence will, under these circumstances, repeat in a confused form whatever he can remember to have read in his favorite columnist. A female, if not too hideously repulsive, will seat herself above the camera lens and cross her legs above the knees. If she conceals her dislike of the reporters with sufficient grace, they may attribute some quip to her that will earn her the reputation of a wit.

Smith interviewed them all—infant prodigies, hog callers, old ladies who professed to have been present when Lincoln was shot, prize fighters—swelling in triumph and swollen in defeat—ball players, candidates, revivalists, messiahs, crooners, Nobel Prize winners, midgets, sex maniacs (in and out of custody), missionaries and strip teasers—the whole horde of those who thrust and jostle for attention or are dragged forward, blinking and bewildered, into the flashbulbs.

Now a man who makes a business of trying to dredge information out of such people is "likely to develop buzzing in the head and take to drink." If he is cursed with sanity and integrity, he will attempt to preserve them by expressing his contempt for the whole proceeding. And since this can't be done openly, it must be done covertly, humorously, by inserting unexpected but convincingly realistic touches of absurdity—such as the Andrews sisters chewing gum as they sing, Anthony Eden with the sole of his shoe coming off, or Michael Strange "talking about Life, Writing, Inspiration and a piece of property she owns in Connecticut and would like to be rid of."

Another way is to turn from the dull great to the interesting obscure and here Smith achieved his greatest success. There was the dentist in Jackson Heights who had a trained dog as a receptionist and rewarded the faithful creature with squirts of mouthwash. There was the man who made a hobby of lurching—dithering this way and that in front of someone who doesn't know whether you are going to pass on his left or right. There was the man who always carried turtle eggs in his pockets and bounced them on

bars as a conversational gambit. There was a jockey who ate flies. There was a man who was knocked down on his own roof by a zeppelin. There was a woman who put vitamins in her drains to keep the bacteria in the septic tank healthy and the manufacturer of brassieres who gave special attention to customers with supernumerary breasts.

"The screwball's Boswell," Fred Allen has called him. But Smith demurs. He denies that he is forever on the prowl for nuts. There is no need, he insists, for questing: God must have loved the wacky, He made so many of them. And even in the staidest hearts there are wild and almost unbelievable impulses and eccentricities. "It is my belief," Smith avers, "that there is no such thing as a 'normal' person."

Perhaps "biographer to the dispensable man," another of Fred Allen's descriptions of his friend, is more accurate; for while Smith has certainly had luck in finding and felicity in portraying his gallery of grotesques, he is not merely competing with Ripley's Odditorium. Lost himself deeper than plummet can ever sound, he sympathizes with the defeated, the frustrate and the hopeless. Nobility and absurdity are often intertwined and the pathetic and the ludicrous are frequently inseparable. It has always been the function of the humorist to lead us into those thoughts that lie too deep for tears. T. : interview with Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom has a fine controlled pathos under its surface lightness. And the little sketch of John Nance Garner, that "whiskey-drinking, poker-playing, evil old man," with his watch pinned on him so that he wouldn't lose it, is a wonderful blend of charm and gentle sadness, the twilight of a titan of the Pecos, an old man in a dry season waiting for death.

It is this deeper perceptiveness that makes Smith a great reporter. As an observer of the passing scene he has few equals. Future historians will be indebted to him, for example, for his picture of the inside workings of a great metropolitan daily. He is especially good on tipsters, dopesters and all who seek to color the news and grind their axes in the process. From long experience he knows the manner in which the purely personal annoyances,

feuds and irritations of reporters, feature writers and editors distort the facts. One writer has a grudge against the telephone company because an operator once refused to return his nickel and always manages to slip some snide phrase into any story in any way related to the telephone service. Another gives an invidious twist to anything about the subway system because a stalled subway train once caused him to miss a date. And so on.

As an interviewer of celebrities he was compelled to have a great deal to do with press agents and publicity men, and any historian who is concerned with the public relations expert (and any historian who isn't shouldn't write the history of our times) will find him a valuable source. M-G-M may never forgive him for revealing their secret instructions to local publicity men on how to promote a visiting starlet, but posterity should be grateful.

His range is extensive. He has given us some of the best glimpses we have of Midwestern small towns in the 1900's, of Hollywood, of apartment-house life in New York and, in recent years, of suburbia. This last he surveys with sardonic tolerance from his eyrie above Mt. Kisco, letting his vision sweep across the valley to the whited tower where the *Reader's Digest*, suburbia's scripture, is solemnly compiled.

*Lost in the Horse Latitudes* remains, perhaps, the most discerning book we have yet had on the zanyism of Hollywood. *Larks in the Popcorn* displays the micromegalomania of the commuter playing at country squire. In *Lo, the Former Egyptian* and *We Went Thataway* Smith takes us across country, surveying the land of filling stations and motels, of souvenirs and insomnia, of indigestion, neon lights, roadside zoos and dude ranches. As his special study he has taken the cowboy, the great synthetic American hero with a heart purer than Ivory soap.

Recently, following in Mark Twain's footsteps, he has gone abroad and in his *London Journal* has told us a great deal about England and a great deal more about America. His account of English street scenes, of dog races, Cotswold chauvinism and, above all, of bars, pubs, saloons, taverns, clubs, dives and all premises whatsoever upon which spirituous liquors were licensed

to be consumed is well done; and his intimate glimpses of the Englishmen in these redoubts, peering out with heavy snortings and muffled defiances of Nye Bevan and America, are superb. The best reportorial bit in the book is his description of the Hon. Euphemia Dalrymple in the hustings. This is good not merely as a piece of humor but as a comment on the fatuity underlying a great deal of what the English call "fair play" and "give-and-take" in politics.

One aspect of the contemporary scene that interests him especially is the vernacular. He does not carry the interest as far as Ring Lardner did, but he notes Dizzy Dean's "airs" for "errors" and "far" for "fire" and points out that his past for "slide" is not "slud," as Joe Williams had said it was, but "slood," rhyming with "wood." When characters in his books use malapropisms they have the ring of authenticity, such as the Brooklynese "surface" for "service." His analyses of upper class and cockney English are keen and show that listening to speech is a serious business with him.

As a folk humorist, Smith finds Culture, with a capital C, fair game. He says that he has "peasant tastes" and glories in his ignorance. He prefers Bing Crosby to Flagstad and suspects that people who cheer and whistle at an entrechat at the ballet are chiefly calling attention to the superior delicacy of their own perceptions. Isadora Duncan's "snatching up scarves and leaping around in the fields," so far as he is concerned, was merely "her way of demonstrating that her digestion was good." In poetry he professes himself "strictly a Shooting of Dan McGrew man," and when it comes to philosophy, high thought and the eternal verities, he agrees with Mencken, whom he justly admires, that these things load the human mind beyond its Plimsoll line.

Nonetheless—even though he would disclaim it as a libel—Smith is primarily an intellectual writer. That is, he is not emotional, flowing with Hoosier "cornbread-and-molasses sentimentality." Dogs that howl beside their dead masters bore him, and as for cats that get trapped in walls, he believes that it would be a wonderful thing for all cats to get trapped in walls and left

there. He is devoid of the crusading instinct. He has no message for the age, no reforms to further, no fealty to any institution, no love for humanity in the abstract and no desire to be loved or respected by the general public.

The thing he has, however, is worth, in a writer, all of these put together. And that one thing is detachment—detachment, the indispensable basis for honesty in a writer. For H. Allen Smith is honest. To those who don't know, it may seem little to say. To those who do, it is everything. There are no clichés in his writing and no acceptance of the reports or opinions of others where he can see and judge for himself. He doesn't tell lies, not even noble lies. He keeps his humor pure, in a way that some of his critics cannot even comprehend, by being honest; for without honesty humor is one of the corruptest manifestations of the human mind. The gladsome chuckle of the announcer as he archly nears the commercial, the forced jollity of the worldly parson, the sniggering of the puritan over a sadistic joke—these things make the flesh creep.

Some who indulge in them have protested sanctimoniously against Smith's bawdry. "The delicate bouquet of a subway rest room," says one, holding his nose. "Barnyard and boudoir!" cries another, reaching for his handkerchief with one hand while marking the place with the other.

But the protest, even where sincere, is invalid. Indecency has always been the handmaid of humor, perhaps because it touches life upon life's basic absurdity—the guts and the glands entrampling the spirit. (We aspire, but we also sweat; and our noblest meditations are subject to borborygmic interruptions.) Certainly Smith is bawdy, but his bawdry, too, is honest. There is no leering, no lascivious nudging, no tee-heeing and tittering on the edge of indecency. Like Chaucer, Fielding and Rabelais, he speaks plainly. A wayfaring man, though a member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, cannot mistake his meaning. "I gave up dancing," he says, "as a ridiculous striving after that which can best be attained in the boudoir." How clear! How ignoble! How sensible!

Smith's humor might be described as quietly boisterous. He is

softly outrageous and gently shocking. There is the surprise of a fine excess in being told that the upper-class English talk "like indignant turkey gobblers" or that L'oyale's immense and untidy bookstore presents "a scene of literary confusion unmatched since William Lyon Phelps."

Much of it is sheer good humor. He does not belong to the school, so popular on radio and television, that seems to think that only insults are funny. He delights in the preposterous and rejoices in the fortuitous. He has a wonderful story of a resourceful prisoner who when put on bread and water—plain bread for breakfast and lunch and raisin bread for supper—outwitted his jailers by saving his two slices of plain bread and putting the slice of raisin bread between them to make a sandwich. Equally good is the delight of an American hostess at having a titled Englishman for a house guest because it permitted her, when she heard him stirring in the morning, to say, "The lord is risen."

One of his best strokes, a flash of pure Midwestern genius, is his reflection on seeing the playing fields of Eton that here was where the Battle of Yorktown was lost.

Smith is a skeptic. "I don't believe in anything," he says, and adds, with quiet devastation, "and am therefore safe." When told of the "miracle" whereby St. Paul's Cathedral had been spared in the blitz, he merely remarked that the same miracle had failed, somehow, to save twenty other London churches though it had spared all the music halls and movie houses in town. He is aware that the type of mind predominant in the world is one that prefers theory to evidence, hearsay to examination and superstition to fact, but he is prepared to announce his minority status and to accept the consequences. For someone who writes for the millions, that takes courage. Nowhere in all his dozen volumes is there even a token appeasement of the bogeys that levy their toll of subservience from most popular writers.

In politics he defines himself as a Big Endian. His contempt for the right is exceeded only by his contempt for the left. He has no fondness for people who believe that they have been put on earth for the purpose of telling others how to run their lives.

Along with Chaucer, Swift, Mark Twain, Mister Dooley, Ring Lardner and H. L. Mencken, he is a cynic. He believes that dishonesty is firmly embedded in the human character and that men have petty larceny forever in their hearts and lies forever in their mouths. He believes that deceit and mistrust are the essence of human relationships. His years of interviewing the great, those who set the styles for the rest of us in apparel, manners and, to some extent, in thoughts, left him with no faith in idols or idolizers. To him one of the greatest philosophers who ever lived was an unknown Thinker who on a steel pillar in the Fourteenth Street I.R.T. subway scribbled "Nuts to people" and then faded into the crowd.

In making the following selection from H. Allen Smith's works I have been guided chiefly by my own preferences, though I have tried to make the excerpts fully representative of his talents. The short interviews and many of the anecdotes were taken from their contexts without any appreciable loss. The bawdry, as always, assumes a greater prominence in a collection such as this than it had in the originals. Most of the humorous pieces stand up by themselves, but some suffer by being read alone, and the wisdom and geniality of the whole of such works as *Larks in the Popcorn* or *We Went Thataway* or *Smith's London Journal* is, unfortunately, lost. To get it, and it's worth getting, the reader must turn to the complete works.

Bergen Evans



# THE MIDWEST





## LIFE ON THE FARM

My father put an ad in the Defiance paper which said: "Wanted—place for Catholic boy, age 12, to work on farm during summer vacation." A few days after that a buggy pulled up in front of our house and out got a big rawboned farmer whose name, as I remember, was Heffner. Actually he was not rawboned; how the hell can anybody be rawboned? But he was big, and when his buggy pulled away from the house I was sitting beside him. What followed was my first and last personal experience with the glories of farm life.

This Heffner had a farm as big as Idaho and no hired help. His wife did most of the chores while he worked in the fields. I don't ever want anybody to say that I never did a hard day's work in my life. That guy had me out of bed before daybreak, raced me through breakfast, and worked *na* steadily until sundown. Even then he wasn't satisfied. We'd come in and wash up and eat supper and then maybe the two of us would wander out into the yard. Mr. Heffner would glance upward.

"Be dog-gone!" he'd say. "Lookit that moon! Might near bright as day. Purty, ain't it?"

"Yeh," I'd say dispiritedly, knowing what was coming.

"That moon," he'd go on, "is easy bright nuff fer us to go out and bring in that hay. C'm on, boy, lc's horness up. Makes a fella feel good t' work by moonlight."

I couldn't argue with him. I couldn't tell him that it didn't make me feel good to work by moonlight. Many times I wanted to tell him the difference between him and me; I wanted to point out that farm work gave him pleasure because he owned the farm,

whereas I hated it and would get pleasure out of seeing his acres sink to China. On those moonlight nights I wanted to tell him that I wasn't interested in bringing in the hay—I wanted to get in it.

I did almost everything that's to be done on a farm and hated every moment of it, and my days were made even more unbearable by the presence of Mr. Heffner's son, a kid of about eight. His name was Tommy and he suffered under a psychopathic condition which made him believe that he was superior to me in all departments. He trailed me around from dawn to dusk, taunting me. Suppose we were in a field, and I was walking in a furrow and he was walking on the ridge. Over and over again he'd say, "I'm higher'n you is!" Then suppose he was in the furrow and I was on the ridge. He'd say, "I'm lower'n you is." It strikes me as being sort of a miracle that I never flogged him to death with a can of popcorn.



## EGYPTIAN ROMANCE

Rigid adherence to traditional forms of etiquette is required of those who would fly in the upper echelons of society. The true aristocrat will suffer death before he'll violate the traditions of his class. Some of this cosmic foolishness, bordering on superstition, drifts down into the lower divisions of the race, often with unhappy consequences. If the thought contained in the foregoing lines isn't clear, which it isn't, let me illustrate.

I have a long and interesting letter from a lady describing certain members of the Smith branch of her family in Little Egypt (southern Illinois). Inasmuch as I have publicly confessed to Egyptian nativity, my correspondent suggested that her Smith relatives might be relatives of mine. It could be. These Smiths had no drawing room, but they had their social traditions and those traditions were dear to them. They lived beside a crick, and there were fourteen children in the family. There was also a feud with a neighboring clan, the Bents. The Smiths said the Bents were white trash, and the Bents said the Smiths were so low that hogs

wouldn't stay on their place, and there was considerable shooting and knifing back and forth in the classical American tradition.

Among the Smith girls was Effie, described by her relative (my correspondent) as "a young lady of exceptional character who could outdripg and outcuss any human being I ever knew." Came the time when Effie fell in love with one of the Bent boys, and after a brief and secret courtship in the woods, an elopement was plotted. On the appointed afternoon Effie was to creep out of the Smith house and meet her lover near the edge of the woods, where he would be waiting with a mule. Then off they would go into wild and distant lands—the adjoining county—to live in happiness ever after. As the hour for her departing approached, Effie began to worry about violating a social tradition. In those parts when a girl married it was traditional for her family to give her a feather bed, and the gift had come to have special meaning—it would insure lasting happiness to the newlyweds. So Effie sat in an upstairs room fretting about a feather bed until at last she heard the whistle from the woods. She stood up and started to leave the room, then stopped and said: "By God, I ain't a-goin' without my feather bed!" Quickly she seized the one that belonged to her mother, hurried to a window, and threw it out. It landed on a chicken, and the chicken screeched as if an H-bomb had hit it. The screech so alarmed the romantic young man in the woods that he yanked out a revolver and fired a wild shot at the barn, and within a few seconds shotguns were roaring and the whole plot was laid bare and Effie Smith was Effie Smith the rest of her life because she had rebelled against violating a social tradition.



## FIRST BANK ACCOUNT

When I lived in Defiance I worked at odd jobs—built banana splits, delivered newspapers, clerked in a grocery and again in a shoe store, and during one period was a nailer in a box factory. One day I went to the bank and opened a savings account with a deposit of four dollars. It was a thrilling experience and remained thrilling

until the next day, when it began to die down a little. I went to the bank and drew out two dollars of the four. After I had frivoleed away one of the dollars, remorse set in and the following morning I redeposited the remaining dollar, giving me a new balance of three dollars. Two days later I drew out two dollars. The day after that I got paid at the shoe store, so I went back and deposited three dollars, fetching me up to my original holdings of four dollars. Then I let two whole days go by before I returned and drew out three dollars. This was the end. The teller told me to wait just a moment. He went backstage somewhere, and pretty soon I was called into an enclosure where sat the man I assumed to be president of the bank. He was straightforward, honest, and altogether aboveboard with me. He said:

"Young man, you have just withdrawn three dollars from our bank. You have a dollar balance. The teller is now withdrawing that dollar for you. I want you to take it and get the hell out of here and stay out."



## COUNTRY CORRESPONDENCE

In the McLeansboro Times of forty years ago I found an item which said Judge C. B. Thomas had been boasting of the time he ran for county treasurer. "I was the only man," said Judge Thomas, "who was ever nominated by acclamation and unanimously defeated."

The country correspondence in those old papers, news from places such as Dog Town and Opossum Creek and Piopolis, was fully as interesting as the items pertaining to McLeansboro itself. Most of the country correspondents seemed to be temperance people, and the demon rum was roughed up in almost every column of crossroads chitchat. There were items such as this:

*Ernest Bode was seen Saturday night riding his horse in Craw Lane. Drunk as usual.*

Or this one:

*The neighbors of Mrs. Katie Gregg saved her from being murdered last week when they found her husband beating her with a piece of stovewood. He has been drunk for three years.*

Along about the time of my birth Mrs. Martha Gullic inserted an ad in the Times. It was strongly worded. Her husband, Theodore, had just died and she wanted to deny the malicious gossip that he passed away in consequence of drinking wood alcohol. It was nothing more, said his widow, than cramps of the stomach and bowels. Her notice was headed: Card of Thanks.



## BAPTISM IN EGYPT

Egypt, as the natives of southern Illinois proudly call their homeland, can lay claim to Robert G. Ingersoll. Egypt, in fact, does. This is a thing that passeth my understanding, inasmuch as organized religion is a powerful element throughout the length and narrowness of Egypt, as it is elsewhere in our land; yet the Egyptians boast of the fact that the great agnostic lived five years in their midst. He was around eighteen when he arrived in the company of his father, who was an itinerant preacher. He lived for a while in Mount Vernon, not far from my birthplace, and he sang the glories of his new home by describing it as "a very miserable part of the world." He spoke feelingly of the texture of the Egyptian countryside, made up chiefly of mud. He went to Metropolis, a town on the Ohio River, to teach school. One evening he was sitting around with some of the townspeople when the discussion turned on baptism. This has always been a topic for lively disputation in Egypt. It is not, however, a question of whether one is for or against baptism; the arguments develop over methods and technique. Men have had their teeth loosened for contending in favor of triple immersion as against a single ducking; people have quit speaking to each other because one argued that baptismal water has curative powers while the other said such a theory was nothing but old nuts; bitter feuds that have lasted for generations have been started by

controversy over whether it is proper for a person being baptized to hold his nose. Even the quantity of water employed in a standard-gauge baptism has at times brought conflict. In my prowlings through the confused history of McLeansboro, I found that my native town once harbored a group of worshipers called the Forty Gallon Baptists.

Robert Ingersoll sat that night in Metropolis listening to the wise old people of the community argue about baptism. He remained discreetly silent until someone finally turned to him and asked him what he thought of baptism.

"Baptism?" he repeated, as though he hadn't been listening. "I think baptism is a good thing—with soap."

As of that moment he was no longer the local teacher, no longer a local resident. The suddenness of his dismissal caught him so short that he had to walk all the way to his folks' home in Marion, fifty miles to the north. Later on he became a lawyer. Since success in the law often depends on a talent for glib talk, and since Ingersoll was a talker to who-laid-the-chunk, he became a successful lawyer; and as soon as he became successful he got out of Egypt. He figured, I suppose, that in leaving Egypt he was improving his condition. But guess where he went. Peoria.



## A CONFESSION

You see, in my case, how impossible it is to create a Hoosier out of the material at hand. I just don't seem to fit. The things that other people remember and yearn for when they leave the Midwest mean little or nothing to me. At no point in my life did I ever stir apple butter or soap. Never did I ever look for water with a willow wand. I had a few freckles when I was a kid, but I never washed them with stump water. I killed a toad or two as a boy, but my cow didn't give bloody milk in consequence. I've smelled new-mown hay and bread in the oven and apple blossoms and all that, but I never considered those smells to be extra-special; I once got a whiff of a beautiful woman in the Stork Club in New York City and, to



me, she smelled better than all the hay that has been new-mown since the lifetime of Adam's neglected nigh ox. Let the frost get on the punkin and let the fodder get in the shock but don't bother me about it. I've got trouble enough trying to pick a winner at Belmont.



## THE HICCUPS

Among its other attractions the Midwest certainly excels in hiccups. When a Midwesterner gets the hiccups he doesn't do any halfway job about it. When I lived in the Midwest I used to get them occasionally, and I can remember the power and the glory of them. Each hiccup came close to tearing off my head. After I moved away to other sections of the country I still got hiccups, but they were feeble and had no character to them.



## ALTAR BOY

It was the custom at St. Mary's for the altar boys to receive cash gratuities after serving at a wedding or a funeral. A wedding was usually worth a dollar and a half to each boy, whereas a funeral brought two dollars and a half. I can remember that the serious illness of a prominent member of the parish always filled me with a certain exultation and on more than one occasion I prayed fervently for death to strike swiftly because I needed dough.

The behavior of altar boys in the Middle West is traditional. Almost every man who ever served Mass will admit that when the service was over it was a custom for the acolytes to sneak back of the altar and drain off the few drops of wine the priest may have left in the cruet. A good many altar boys will confess, too, that at one time or another they snitched a quarter or so from the collection basket after it had been brought into the sacristy. I did these things, but they got me into no trouble, and when I confessed them I was simply given my penance to do and told to desist. My

trouble came when I undertook to revitalize the serving of the Mass.

A boy named Theodore was usually my partner in serving Mass, and we were assigned to the seven-thirty service on Sundays. One day the thought came to me that the ceremony needed brightening up, that altar boys had been serving Mass in the same old way for hundreds of years and that the ritual was getting stuffy with age.

I sounded out Theodore and was able to convince him that I had a praiseworthy scheme. For two or three days we worked together in secret, perfecting a fresh technique. Then one Sunday morning we popped it on the parish.

The new system was not given an amiable reception. It was, in fact, roundly condemned. Theodore and I had not tipped anyone off. Even Father Murphy didn't know what was coming.

From the very beginning of the service Theodore and I ran counter to tradition. We executed double genuflections when we came together in front of the altar—quick, precise bobbings instead of the old, more dignified single genuflections. When we stood together at the side of the altar with the cruets containing water and wine we were not content to pass them on to Father Murphy's hands as he indicated his wants. We had little crisscrossings of arms and we managed to clink the cruets musically. The whole business was fancied up, and the congregation sat wall-eyed as Theodore and I caracoled and swooped and did little dance steps about the altar. It was the last Mass I ever served.



## SUCKERS

The people of Illinois are known to the rest of the country as Suckers, and their land is the Sucker State. They don't particularly like the name and shy away from it, preferring to call their domain the Prairie State.

First and foremost I am an Egyptian, or former Egyptian, but at the same time I am a Sucker, or former Sucker, and I have no objection to being called one. The name doesn't indicate that a citizen of Illinois is an easy mark, never to be given an even break. You

won't find any Illinois people grouped in front of the pitchmen who sell miraculous potato peelers in Times Square. In fact, as I write these words there is a man out in Illinois busy making "genuine Indian arrowheads" which he sells at fancy prices and which are so cleverly fashioned that the foremost authorities on genuine Indian arrowheads have been fooled by them.

Also in Illinois there was once a man who put an ad in country weeklies throughout the state, saying:

*Sure way to kill potato bugs: send twenty two-cent stamps for a recipe that cannot fail.*

He had to hire a dray to handle the mail that came in, and inside of two weeks more than seven thousand Illinois farmers had sent in their stamps. After a while, when the farmers got no response, a group of them armed themselves with heavy clubs and went to the address mentioned in the ad. They were told at the office that the potato-bug man had been called to Europe on business and that all he had left behind was a package containing several thousand slips of paper on which were printed:

*Put your bug on a shingle. Then hit it with another shingle.*

Few citizens of Illinois, I imagine, know the origin of the nickname Sucker. The likely explanation may be found in *A Treasury of American Folklore*, in the form of a letter written from Illinois to the *Providence Journal* many years ago. Here it is:

*The Western prairies are, in many places, full of holes made by the "crawfish" (a fresh-water shellfish similar in form to the lobster) which descends to the water beneath. In early times, when travelers wended their way over these immense plains, they very prudently provided themselves with a long hollow weed, and when thirsty, thrust it into these natural artesian, and thus easily supplied their longings. The crawfish-well generally contains pure water, and the manner in which the traveler drew forth the refreshing element gave him the name of "Sucker."*

If the people of Illinois still shy away from their time-honored

nickname, let them look westward and take satisfaction in the knowledge that their next-door neighbors, the Missourians, are called Pukes.



## THE HOOSIER

Indiana is a fascinating state in spite of the sorry beginnings it had. It used to be inhabited by two savage peoples—the Indians and the whites. The Indians didn't have much sense and were inclined to eat each other. It took a long time to bounce them out of the state, but the white settlers who swarmed in from the East and South managed to do it by giving them whisky until they were unable to distinguish between sheep droppings and Shinola.

The early white settlers, according to the books, believed in saving some of the whisky for themselves, arguing that they needed it in summer to ward off sunstroke and in winter to keep themselves warm. At the same time they were a deeply religious people and believed that they had been put on earth for the purpose of telling other people how to run their lives. More than one historian has remarked that, throughout its early history, Indiana was the most narrow and most provincial commonwealth in the country.

The Indians have gone, and while many bigots still inhabit the state, Indiana has shown vast improvement in this direction. Most Hoosiers of my acquaintance are robust and lusty in their attitude toward life, and I even know a few who are willing to let other people live and believe as they choose. There is no more bigotry today in Muncie, Indiana, than there is in Mount Kisco, New York. Perhaps not as much.

A Hoosier loves to sentimentalize over the fact that he is a Hoosier, and he also loves to laugh. His humor is earthy; he enjoys telling a dirty story or listening to one. The late Ernie Pyle was as typical a Hoosier as you could find—overflowing with cornbread-and-molasses sentimentality and a guy who loved nothing so much as a session of storytelling in which the stories dealt with barnyard and boudoir. He once predicted that I will die on the gallows.

The earthiness of the ordinary Hoosier is reflected in a document I acquired while I was in Indianapolis. It is a copy of Senate Bill No. 499, which was introduced in the State Senate on February 10, 1909, and reported favorably for passage two days later. I don't know if it ever passed but I do know that it was sent through the hopper.

Senate Bill No. 499 had its origin with a small group of newspaper correspondents and lobbyists. These men were gassing back and forth about the general business of lawmaking and someone suggested that the most fantastic kind of a secondary bill could be introduced in the Legislature and run through without much danger of opposition.

An experiment was decided upon, and someone drew up the bill. It starts out as follows:

"A Bull of an Act levying a service tax on all stallions, jacks, bulls, bears, bucks, rams, dogs, tomcats, and other fertile male animals, the revenue derived to be used to provide mental relief and solaces for all mules, steers, barrows, geldings, and other castrated and/or impotent animal eunuchs.

"Whereas, sufficient consideration never has been given to the sad plight of animal eunuchs, the shocking operation during their tender years, their total loss of one of the major pleasures of life, their keen embarrassment when in sight and hearing of the functioning of their more fortunate fellows, now, therefore, there ort to be a law."

I think I'll stop at this point. There are four pages of it altogether, but it gets a little riskay as it goes along, and there are reasons why I would not consider writing anything that is even slightly off-color.



## THE VILI AGE ATHEIST

At one time there was an old guy who went around talking socialism and atheism and, as regards the latter creed, had a convincer which he used on anybody who would hear him out. After

enumerating all the standard proofs, McLeansboro's village atheist would deliver his convincer as follows:

"You think they's a God? You think they's a God that's alwees good to his childern? Well, I'll show you how good he is. You ever look at a hawg real close? How many hams has he<sup>o</sup> got on him? Right. Two hams. On the back. Now—WHY AIN'T HE ALSO GOT HAMS ON THE FRONT? If they was a God, that space on the front of a hawg wouldn't of been wasted, would it? They ain't no reason on earth why a hawg shouldn't pervide a man with four hams steada two, and if they was a God and he was takin' care uh his childern, then by God he'd-a put them exter hams on."



## GETTING IN LINE

The period in which my wife and I were traveling through the Midwest was an unhealthy one, economically. Those were the times, you might say, that tried men's souls. To get a hotel room it was necessary to telephone ahead a week or two before you wanted the accommodations. Meat was still hard to get. It was the era of the nylon lines and all the other lines. I remember walking up Main Street in Vincennes, preoccupied with trying to get a wor<sup>r</sup> out of my head. I get words running through my mind as so<sup>r</sup>... people get songs. Usufruct. That word had popped into my head and I couldn't get rid of the scamp. I think it is an interesting word, and for a long time I had wanted to use it and had been waiting for an opportunity to work it into a composition. Usufruct as a noun, means: "The right of using and enjoying the fruits o profits of an estate or other thing belonging to another, without impairing the substance." I've never personally been in a situation like that. Whenever I enjoy the fruits or profits of an estate or other thing belonging to another, you can depend on me to impair th substance. Usufruct is also a verb, meaning to hold property subject to usufruct. It is difficult for me to use it in a sentence; it doesn't sound right to say, for example, "Charlie was usufructed at Camdet last week."

My mind was going "usufruct, usufruct, usufruct" to the measure of my footsteps up Main Street when I saw a sight that was common all over the United States early in the year 1906. Seemingly appearing from nowhere, half a dozen people formed the beginning of a line in front of a store, and before I had taken another ten steps the line was half a block long. Nylons, I thought. Or maybe even better than that, pork chops, or cold chisels, or pipe cleaners, or wall-to-wall carpeting. As was the custom, I stepped into the line and moved slowly along with it. I rather hoped it would be nylons, my wife being urgently in need of hosiery. By the time I had reached the entrance to the store the line behind me extended half a block to the corner, then disappeared around that corner, and very likely was snaked out as far as the Wabash. On reaching the doorway I was able to see inside, and when I saw what was being sold I stepped out of the line and resumed usufructing. It was chewing gum, and I don't use it.





# FAMILY MATTERS





## NOTES ON A FATHER

In recent years my father has been living at a camp on the banks of the Potomac about twenty miles above Washington. Until he grew weary of it, he was employed at the camp as a sort of custodian, renting canoes and fishing tackle to the customers, keeping the cabins repaired, and looking after the establishment's little truck garden.

I visited Pop at the camp in the summer of 1901.

I found him among his cronies. One of these is a gentleman employed as an assistant plumber in an insane asylum. Another is a stiff backed old man, around seventy, wearing a drooping mustache and inhabiting a cabin back in the woods some distance from the camp. This old guy's name is Mose. He is the final remnant of an old Virginia family.

Mose often walks eight miles to a crossroads store to get some beer and many times Pop has made the sixteen mile hike with him. Mose buys a case of beer when he has the money. Then he starts for home with the cargo in his arms. He'll walk maybe two miles and then he'll remark to himself that his burden is getting intolerably heavy and maybe he ought to drink a bottle or two to lighten the load. He'll stop and knock off two bottles, walk another half mile, sit down under a tree, drink three more, walk another half mile, and so on—reaching his cabin at last with an empty case.

One day Mose drank a dozen bottles of beer at the store before taking up his full case and starting the long journey home. When he got into the woods he soon grew thirsty. He drank half-a-dozen more beers, moved on, and then tried to drink some more, but he couldn't get the caps off the bottles. He had no opener, and his

condition was such that he was unable to devise another method of uncapping the bottles. He couldn't even bite them off. He had to weave all the way home before he could get another drink and, once in his cabin, he resolved that this dilemma should never be put upon him again.

Having nothing else to do, Mose got busy acquiring bottle openers, and when he had about fifty of them he went into the woods with a hammer and a pocketful of nails. He hung beer bottle openers on trees all along the eight-mile trail to the store and nowadays he never gets home with anything but an empty case.

Living in the neighborhood is a lady who writes novels, and she has long taken an interest in Mose and Pop. One day she came down to the camp to see Pop.

"Mose has lice on him," she told Pop. "I found it out today. Now, Mr. Smith, I want you to get him down here and give him a good scrubbing and get some food into him."

Pop went up and got Mose, who was full of beer, and led him down to the camp. He got some water and heated it and put it in a galvanized washtub. Mose sat and mumbled. He was ashamed of himself, but he swore that the man didn't live who could give him a bath. Pop gentled him and told him that if he submitted and behaved himself, they would have a nice mess of black-eyed peas after the bath. Mose is crazy for black-eyed peas.

Mose began to chant

"Drunk and lousy and black-eyed peas! Drunk and lousy and black-eyed peas!"

He kept it up all during the bathing operation and finally cleansed and depopulated and fed, went back up the hill to his cabin. The next day he came into the camp again. He had been to the store. He was chanting:

"Drunk and lousy and black-eyed peas! Drunk and lousy and black-eyed peas!"

"Mose," said Pop, "you're drunk all right, but I guarantee you ain't lousy."

Mose laid a forefinger against his nose and studied this intelligence for a while. Then he began a new chant:

"Drunk and crazy and black-eyed peas! Drunk and crazy and black-eyed peas!"

Pop is in his early sixties. He has always been a remote sort of person to me, because I left home when I was fifteen. When I decided to go to Virginia and visit him I approached the thing a little sadly. I figured I would find an old man, spiritless and debilitated. When I first came upon him he was wearing an undershirt. His arms and shoulders and chest were the equipment of an athlete. His biceps were as hard as mahogany. There was little gray in his black hair and he had his own teeth. He looked as though he could lick any man his size. He could take a rifle and, without glasses, outshoot anyone in the neighborhood. And though work is the thing he hates most in life, he has a reputation for being the handiest man in forty square miles.

He was born and raised in southern Illinois and speaks a sort of Ozarkian language. He is immensely profane but seldom obscene. He can tarnish the welkin with beautiful cussing and when I complimented him on his talents in this direction he said he learned it at a tender age, hanging around a poolroom in McLeansboro.

He is one of the most impatient men alive. The editors of *Time* magazine might be interested to know that Pop talks back to their publication. He subscribes to *Time* and each week reads it from cover to cover, talking and cussing a blue streak—not really at *Time*, but at the human beings whose antics are reported in its pages.

During my visit he was telling me about his impatience with his fellow creatures. He said he had always been that way and told me a story in illustration.

"You was the first boy," he said, "and I suppose I felt a little like other fellas about it at first. Maybe you don't remember this, but when you was about four or five years old I made you a kite. Be god damn if I didn't work half a day on it. Made the best damn kite I ever saw in my life. Then I took you over to a field alongside the brickyard and give you the string, and stretched 'er out, and I held the kite. Then I hollered at you to run. Well, you run a little ways and the kite started goin' up and got up about fifty foot and, by God, you stopped and turned around to look at it. It started

comin' down, and I hollered at you to run, and you run a little piece and then you turned around and looked at it again. I was cussin' you and tellin' you to keep runnin', but you'd only run a little ways and then you'd stop and turn around to look. Fin'ly the kite come down and I was so god-damn mad I walked up to it and stomped it to pieces and went on home and cursed every step of the way."

He worked hard during the years his nine kids were growing up. He worked in his father's brickyard, then as a cigar maker, and later in various poultry houses. He'd work all day and then come home and work. He built better furniture than you could buy at a store. He had a cobbling outfit and always half-soled all the family shoes. And he was the family barber.

Up until I was about ten years old Pop always cut my hair. It was a harrowing operation—perhaps the most horrible memory I have of my childhood.

I would be jammed into the baby's high chair. A sheet would be tied around my neck so tightly that it is a wonder to me I didn't die of strangulation. Then Pop, who enjoyed the business no more than I, would begin.

It always took him an unconscionable time, or so it seemed to me, and he kept up a running commentary throughout the operation—a flow of bitter, acid language that kept my scalp free of parasites. He made disparaging remarks about my hair. He objected to its texture. His speech, as I said, has an Ozarkian flavor. The syllable "ire" becomes "arr" in his tongue. Thus he speaks of a thing being "hard as arm," and of "builidin' a farr," and so on. During those horrendous haircuts he'd keep growling:

"Hair jist like warr!"

The actual cutting of the hair was akin to being broken on the rack, yet it was as child's play compared to the torture that came with the conclusion of the transaction. Throughout the snipping (he never managed to acquire clippers) I must admit that I had a certain amount of compensating enjoyment from my father's unorthodox use of the nine parts of speech. But the climax of a haircut at home was unleavened horror.

Having finished the actual scissorwork, Pop would stand off and sight at me with one eye and then the other, cursing a bad job badly done. Then he'd unfasten the sheet, and I'd bend my head for the furious assault. This was the job of removing particles of hair from my neck and its environs. He would clap his large left hand down over my skull, lean forward, and start blowing and puffing. As he blew he would flail my neck with the flat of his right hand—full, vigorous blows they were too—huffing and cuffing for what seemed like an hour. When at last it was over, I would get out of the chair, stagger into the back yard, collapse on the grass beneath the cherry tree, and just lie there. If a wasp stung me I wouldn't even notice it.

Not long ago, during a Christmas shopping season, I remembered something out of my childhood, something involving Pop's inventiveness. I was in the most famous toy store in America and I was marveling at the ingenuity of the men who fashion our modern playthings. They had dolls that would do everything human except live together as man and wife. There were mechanical contrivances much more intricate than the inside of a cow. Watching these things whirr and whizz and click and clack, I got to thinking about a straight pin. I agreed that the toymakers were clever, but never so clever as Pop.

At Christmas time, when I was a kid, we always managed to get a few toys, some purchased out of Pop's pay envelope and some contributed by relatives. These toys were never, however, of an enduring quality and by mid-January we had broken them beyond hope, or traded them off, or thrown them at a cat. The rest of the year we had to depend on our own ingenuity for playthings.

Pop, as I have suggested, was a man who enjoyed reading his newspaper in peace each evening—those evenings when he didn't have shoes to repair or furniture to fix. Peace and quiet, in a house containing eight or nine children and a dog, is well-nigh unthinkable. He tried yelling at us, but you can't quiet that many younguns by yelling. Maybe for a few minutes, but then the leapfrog and the snow fights and the quarreling start all over again. One evening six or seven of us were creating the usual bedlam

and Pop was trying to read his newspaper. At last he had an idea. He took a penny out of his pocket, got down on the floor, and began to rub the coin vigorously back and forth on the rug. All of us gathered about him, wondering if he had suddenly been stricken daft. He rubbed the penny for several minutes, then held it up for us to see. One side of it glistened as it hadn't glistened since it left the mint.

Pop then handed each of us a penny and set us to work. We rubbed those pennies until they shone like bright gold, and we were quiet about it too. When we had given a glitter to both sides of our coins we took them proudly to Pop. He received each one, examined it on either side, and in each case grinned and said:

"Hm-m-m-m Bee-yootiful!"

Then he put the shiny pennies back in his pocket.

For a time after that, whenever the tumult grew great in the house, Pop would summon us to his chair, give us each a penny, and say:

"Go shine "

This assured him at least a half-hour of quiet. He always took the pennies back, but one day he made the mistake of letting us keep them. From then on he realized that it would break our hearts if he took them back. He had to invent a new game.

Again he got down on the floor, this time with a magazine cover and a straight pin. On the magazine cover was an illustration of a girl's head and Pop placed it flat on the rug, face up. Then, with the pin, he began sticking holes around the outline of the head. He made the pinholes as close together as possible and covered almost every line of the illustration—eyes, nose, mouth, chin, hairline. It took him a long while, and when he had finished he got up, went to the lamp, and held the sheet up to the light. To us it was pure beauty—a girl's head lined in sparkling pin points of light.

Thereafter Pop's evenings were quiet. When the hubbub started he'd call us around, hand us each a pin, and say:

"Go stick."

We'd lie on the floor and stick by the hour. We got magazine covers from the neighbors and Pop brought home all he could find.



## FAMILY MATTERS

We'd spend a whole evening sticking a single cover, and when we were finished we'd take the result to Pop. He'd put down his paper, take the magazine cover, hold it up to the light, and say:

"Hm-m m-m. Bee-yootiful!"

During my recent visit with him I recalled this "Go stick" business and asked Pop if he had actually invented the game.

"Don't remember," he said. "Don't think I ever invented nothin' in my life."

It had been my hope that, by spending several days with him, I'd be able to mine some stories out of him. I told my brother Sam in advance of my intentions, but suggested that he keep quiet about it. I figured that if Pop knew I was planning on writing about him, he'd be inclined toward reticence. My brother did tell him—told him about a month before my arrival at the camp that I was coming down and that I might want to write some stories about his early life. Sam told me later that Pop made the eight mile hike that day not for beer. He came back from the store with a handful of writing tablets. He shut himself up in his cabin and wrote for a week and a half, neglecting his work around the camp and telling no one what he was doing. Sam knew he was writing, but never said a word to him about it. Then one day Pop returned to his customary labors. A week passed, and Sam finally asked him about it.

"Did you get finished writing your life story, Pop?"

"Who told you I was writin' enything?" Pop demanded.

"Ah, I knew it," said Sam. "Where is it?"

"I threw the god damn thing in the stove and burnt it up," said Pop.

"What did you do that for?"

"I couldn't git no good endin' for it."

His magnificent cussing is blasphemous in character, never lewd. He simply dislikes women and refuses to pay them the compliment of talking about their questionable charms.

He got started on the subject by condemning the widespread use of the expression, "Like Mother used to make." He himself is an expert cook and he won't concede that women are talented in the same direction.

"You hear people talk," he said, "about how good their mothers could cook, but it ain't true. Kids will eat anything and think it tastes good. Almost all kids are that way. A growin' kid will eat the bark off a tree and think it's good. So when kids grow up and start losin' their appetites, they remember back when they used to eat their mothers' cookin' and how good it used to taste, and they think from that their mothers was marvelous cooks. Prob'ly nine tenths of them couldn't cook as good as old Mose can."

From that point he went to a discussion of feminine beauty.

"It's all the way you look at them," he said. "If you give some thought to it, you won't decide women are so beautiful. Men are always talkin' about how beautiful a woman's breasts is. Go look at one. Suppose women were built different than they are today. Suppose all the women in the world had only one breast apiece and it was right in the middle and had tits on it like a cow. What would the men say? Beautiful! They'd go around grabbin' at that unsightly thing and talkin' about how lovely and round it was, and how pink, and so on. All right. Suppose that's the way it was, and along come a woman with two breasts like they got now. Good God! That woman would be a circus freak and men wouldn't be able to look at her without getting sick at the stummick. So I got it figured out that a woman's breasts are unbeautiful, not to mention downright ugly."

I never, myself, thought of it in quite that way. Too late to start now.

When my father was in the vicinity of twelve years old he was unreasonable about bananas. He could never get enough of them. In those days bananas were almost as rare as rotolactors and Pop's passionate yearning for them became a source of irritation to his parents.

One afternoon his father summoned him to the front yard of the Smith homestead. Hanging from a lower limb of the mulberry tree was a stalk of bananas, full and complete.

"Yonder's some bananas for you," said Caleb Smith.

The entire family, augmented by half-a-dozen neighbors, gath-

ered in the front yard to watch Pop eat bananas. He vows to this day that he didn't move off the spot until he had consumed every one of those bananas. He has not eaten another during all of the ensuing fifty years. It nauseates him to be in the same room with a banana.



## POP AS CIGAR MAKER

In Cuba and other Latin countries where cigars are made, and in Tampa where the cigar makers are Latins, a man is employed and paid by the workers to sit at one end of the room and read aloud throughout the day.

"Up North," Pop told me, we never had a reader, but we had a system of talkin'. We had one guy named Benny, and ever' mornin' after we'd got into the swing of the work, somebody would yell out, 'Start somethin', Benny.' That meant Benny was to think up a good subject to talk about. In a little while Benny would say, maybe, 'Airplanes.' Then the guy on the end next to the door would start to talk. He'd talk about airplanes. Maybe he'd say that by God they'd never git him up in one of them things. He'd tell about the first time he'd ever seen one. And he'd say if God meant fer us to fly he'd a put feathers on us. When he got through it moved on to the next man and he would talk as long as he could about airplanes and it would go all around the room like that. The only one that never talked on any of the subjects was Benny. He was good at pickin' subjects—he was always the one that picked out the subject—but he couldn't talk about anything worth a damn, and didn't want to.

"I remember once when Benny give us the subject about plantin' crops in the light of the moon or the dark of the moon. Ever'body had a strong opinion, me and one other fella, we were the only ones that said we didn't believe in that crap. You never heard such argyn'. It almost ended up in a fight. Finely ever'body decided they would appoint me to write a letter to the State Agriculture Department in Springfield and git a scientific answer to it. We

wanted to have it settled once and fer all. So I wrote to the head guy of the Agriculture Department and in about a week I got my answer. That son-of-a-bitch was a politician and hedged on me. He wrote this letter and said in it, 'I have no official data on this matter. Some people say the moon affects plantings and other people say it don't. It is my personal opinion, however, that there may be something to it, although it might be that there is nothing to it'. I could tell in a minute that he was gettin' ready to run for governor or somethin' and he wasn't gonna take a chance on losin' any votes by comin' out one way or another about the moon. I'm glad it happened the way it did because it woke me up to these politicians. I got no use for the bastards. Why couldn't he come right out and take a stand on this moon business? He knew damn well that the moon's got nothin' to do with plantin' reddishes or corn or when you should put shingles on your house. But would he say so? No!"



## THE COMET PILLS

Back about 1900, on a Saturday afternoon, Pop and some of his friends took what he calls a kag of beer into the woods. They set the kag on a hillside and went to work on it with no thought for sprites or elves or nymphs, and when they had finished it they returned to town and found a pitchman from St. Louis at work on the courthouse square. This man had come into McLeansboro with a barrel (or kag) full of pills.

Halley's comet was in the sky at that time, and the pitchman preached that the comet was giving off lethal gases, that a mere whiff of these fumes would be sufficient to kill a person, and that the only way to gain immunity from death by comet gas was to swallow one of his pills. They were twenty five cents each, and the man was selling them as fast as he could hand them out. Word of his presence, and of his lifesaving pills, spread swiftly over the country, and those farmers not already in town were hitching up their sandy land mules and hurrying across the dusty roads, hoping

## FAMILY MATTERS

the comet gas wouldn't get them before they reached the square.

My father said he listened to the pitchman's spiel and, becoming smitten with beery foreboding, got to worrying about me, his only son, and the likelihood of my being carried off by comet fumes before I'd even had a good start in life; so he quietly bought one of the pills and hurried home with it, and when nobody was looking poked it down my gullet. Right after that I got the croup and diphtheria, but Pop said he doesn't think the comet pill was responsible.

"I never told anybody about it," he said, "because I figured maybe that pill was the thing that made you turn out bad."

I am unable to convey, in print, the nuances he managed to get into that last statement, but his manner and tone indicated clearly that I suffer from a virulent form of insanity and he hopes to God he is not to blame for it.



## ANCESTORS

My aunt Vieve (short for Genevieve) is my father's sister and lives in a trim bungalow on North Washington Street, and when the time came for me to involve myself in some family history I consulted her, for she seems to be the nearest thing to a clan historian that we have. She got out some albums and I went through them. They were filled with ancient photographs, mostly of men, with long beards and a belligerent fear of God reflected in their eyes; they all looked as though they hated the photographer who was taking their pictures and would shortly assault him. Most of them were my kin, but I had never heard of them and was just as happy that I hadn't. Those fierce-looking old baboons were inhabitants of Egypt and other parts of Illinois, and I can't understand why William Jennings Bryan, who must have grown up among them, ever went to Dayton, Tennessee, and took the side he did. The tintypes of my ancestors argue more for the theory of evolution than all the writings of Darwin.



## CAD ALLEN

Joe Allen's son, C J Allen, popularly known as 'Cad' Allen, was my grandfather. Cad was a sort of jack of all trades around McLeansboro. He was a member of the volunteer fire department, although he didn't occupy the eminence of my other grandfather, Caleb Smith, who was First Plugman of Hose Company No. 1. I have heard it said, though, that nobody enjoyed going to a good fire so much as Cad Allen. A story is told in the family of how in the middle of a summer night the fire alarm sounded. Cad leaped out of bed and began throwing on his clothes. He was all ready to rush out of the house when one of his young daughters began wailing in another room, saying she wanted a drink of water. Cad went to the kitchen and got a glass of water and took it to her and had to stand by until she had finished it. Again he started for the door, but my grandmother called him back and asked him to turn down the wick in the lamp near her bed. He came back and turned it down and for the third time started for the door, but halfway there he stopped and announced loudly, "Now if they's anything else anybody wants, just speak up because I ain't in no hurry a tall!"



## GRANDMA'S PHONE

Aunt Vieve told me how one of the first telephones in McLeansboro was installed at the Home Place, and how, whenever it rang, Grandma Smith would run her tongue over her lips and smooth down her hair before answering it.



## HISTORICAL NOTE

I choose, at this point, to tell a story concerned with the Sinatra daffiness. Frank Sinatra is still around, still doing well for himself

## FAMILY MATTERS

and punching the right people, but much of the hysteria has waned, and it is possible nowadays for him to appear in public with a good chance that he won't have his suspenders jerked off by his juvenile admirers

The world knows how the Sinatra Plague swept the United States and possessions a few years ago, seizing as its victims those girls who were on the very doorstep of womanhood, adding the contents of their brainpans and confusing their tongues. To my knowledge I am the only parent among hundreds of thousands who whipped the thing without recourse to chloroform or a baseball bat.

The disease hit my house when my daughter was fourteen, she and her little group of girl friends took down with the murrain and stayed semiconscious for months. When Frankie's voice came over the radio other members of the family were not permitted to speak, whisper, or use the sign language, no one was allowed to move around, scratch himself, or belch.

I made the error once of uttering a disparaging remark about Mr. Sinatra. I didn't say I thought he looked like an ailing toad-frog. I simply remarked that I didn't think he was particularly handsome. Five girls, including my daughter, quit speaking to me for three weeks. I regained my standing only through an abject confession of ignorant error.

When Sinatra time arrived those girls would issue their demand for sepulchral silence ten minutes before The Voice arrived in the room. They'd sit and listen and pretend to swoon with each bar of music, as was the fashion. When he did little tricks with his larynx they'd drop back into their chairs, roll their eyes up corpse-fashion, and go limp.

The walls of their rooms were converted into fantastic galleries. They clipped every interview, feature story, gossip item, and picture of their hero from newspapers and magazines, and these they glued to the walls. One of the girls had a blowup of his head fastened to the ceiling directly over her bed so that he would be gazing down at her when she awoke each morning.

Their conversations were of nothing else, and the telephone talk was both marvelous and maddening. "He" and "Him" meant but

one person In the midst of this pestilence circumstances arose which, in the end, gave me an opportunity to rid my house of the bug. I moved to Hollywood, having been engaged to stare at walls for Paramount I put my daughter in school at Azusa and she was permitted to come in to Hollywood for occasional week ends

Sinatra had just recently become a resident of Hollywood I had never seen one of his broadcasts but I had heard that they were screwy affairs, so I arranged to risk life and limb by attending one at the CBS Playhouse on Vine Street A few days before the broadcast I met Marc Connelly and he told me he was working on a motion-picture story based on the Sinatra legend Mr Connelly mentioned the fact that he had never seen Sinatra, nor had he ever heard the guy sing I asked him to go along with me to the broadcast

We arrived at the theater early in the afternoon to find the germ carriers lined up out front They were in double file and the line stretched two blocks down the street We talked to some of these girls and found that most of them had been on the line since eight o'clock that morning, though they wouldn't be admitted to the theater until fifteen minutes before six in the evening Among them we found a group of Chinese bobby soxers They called themselves "The Five" and they were dedicated to the uninhibited worship of Frankie They told us that they had bought a present for their Frankie that very day It was a handkerchief and it had already been sent in to him They enclosed a note with it which said

"Please, Frankie, wear this handkerchief in your coat pocket for us today But after today we don't want you to wear it in your pocket We want you to blow your nose on it"

Mr Connelly and I went into the empty theater and took seats for the rehearsal, during which Mr Connelly had opportunity to observe the singer in action Then we adjourned to the Brown Derby to talk it over, returning to the theater as time for the broadcast drew near We took seats on the front row where it would be convenient for us to turn around and watch the face of the audience



## FAMILY MATTERS

They didn't open the front doors and keep them open. They let the afflicted girls enter in waves—about thirty to a wave. That in itself was a spectacle worth seeing. There we sat, alone in the quiet auditorium. A burst of shrieks signaled the entrance of the first demented wave, and wave is the word. Half of the girls in that first wave scorned use of the aisles and came right down the center of the auditorium. It was the only time in my life that I have ever seen people run at full speed across the tops of theater seats. The race was for the first row and not a girl was killed or maimed. In a moment Mr. Connelly and I were surrounded by babbling, chattering, excited sub-females. Most of them carried autograph books and a couple grabbed Mr. Connelly.

"Are you connected with him?" they demanded.

"With whom?" asked Mr. Connelly.

"Frankie!" they cried. "Who else?"

"No, I'm sorry," said Mr. Connelly. "We are just spectators."

That was all the attention we got. Had we been connected in some way with Frankie, had we been clients, say, of the same advertising agency which had Frankie's sponsor for a client, then we'd have been important and our names would have gone into the autograph books.

The curtain went up above five minutes to six, and somebody introduced the band leader and then Frankie came on stage. The girls screeched like passengers on an exploding steamboat and Frankie turned his face toward them. He smiled, ever so wistfully. They shrieked three times as vigorously. All during the show that guy had only to glance out at the audience to send those girls into spasms. The kids in the front row fastened their chins over the lip of the stage, fastened their eyes on Frankie and never once took them off. Sledge hammers couldn't have moved them.

We sat through the broadcast, listened to the squeals and whinies, and when it was over we started out by way of the stage entrance. Backstage I saw Sinatra in a corner writing with a pen and with him was George Evans, his press agent. I knew Evans from New York and went over and asked him, in a moment of weak-

ness, if I could get an autographed picture for my daughter. The Voice obliged and I mailed the thing out to school

I should have known better That picture sent her temperature to a new high, aggravating the miasma to a point where its chief symptoms were loss of appetite and chronic trance,

Something had to be done about it

I was having my shoes shined at the Paramount lot one afternoon when George Brown came along with a couple of ladies and introduced them I was interested in one of them more than the other, for she was Sue Carol, wife of Alan Ladd I knew that Alan Ladd was the Number Two man in the affections of my daughter and all her friends He had been top man before Frankie came along and he was still up there close in second place I explained this state of affairs to Mrs Ladd and made a proposition which she accepted

The following week end Nancy came in from Azusa, and on Saturday morning I took her on a tour of the Paramount studio She met a number of picture stars and was reasonably impressed, and grateful to me, and we went home early in the afternoon Then I told her that I had to make a business call on a producer and she could go along She said she was tired and that she didn't care particularly about meeting any producers but that if I wanted her to go, she would go She asked me the name of the producer we were going to meet and I couldn't think of anything to say except Sistrom

We drove out Los Feliz Boulevard and up Rufus Blair's street and stopped in front of a house As we went up the sidewalk I saw Sue Carol open the front door I took a few steps ahead, winked at Mrs Ladd, and said loudly, "Mrs Sistrom, this is Nancy"

"Mrs Sistrom" welcomed us and led us into the living room where we stood talking for a minute or two

Then into the room came this guy He had on nothing but a pair of sneakers and swimming trunks Nancy turned around and looked at him and grabbed her face with her hands and started making noises in her throat as though she had swallowed fifteen cent worth of bubble gum

I led her over to a chair and eased her into it. She hadn't taken her eyes off Mr. Ladd. It turned out that he is a shy sort of person, that he was almost as embarrassed as Nancy, that he didn't know what to say, what to talk about. He got into a chair opposite Nancy, keeping his eyes averted from her, and finally said, "Let's have a drink." I asked Nancy what she would like to have and she gurgled unintelligibly and I ordered a coke for her. Mrs. Ladd went to get the drinks.

We sat there in silence for a while, then Mr. Ladd and I started talking about motion pictures and the Army. Occasionally he would steal a glance at the cataleptic creature opposite him, then quickly look away. Mrs. Ladd and the drinks arrived. Mr. Ladd picked a glass off the tray, stood up, walked over to Miss Smith, held it out, and said.

"Here you are, Nancy."

She took it with a trembling hand. She looked into his face and said

"I've got friends back in New York who're just gonna die when they hear this!"

Mr. Ladd retreated to his chair. Mrs. Ladd went upstairs and got the baby and brought it down. Nancy asked if she might touch it. Permission granted. She touched it. She then managed to summon sufficient parts of speech to say that it was the sweetest, prettiest, loveliest, most beautiful, most gorgeous baby she had ever seen in her life.

At length we decided to go, and as we moved toward the door Mr. Ladd stood up and said for us to wait a few minutes. He went into the dining room, got a photograph of himself, and wrote something on it for Nancy—something about thanks for coming and to come back again soon.

I took her by the arm and led her back to the street, and driving home she sat with a blank look in her eyes. I took her up to the apartment. All she had to say to me, repeated over and over as though addressing God, was, "Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

Her mother had to take her shopping, but it was an hour or

so before her knees were steady enough for routine walking. She just sat and quoted the words he had spoken to her.

"'Here you are, Nancy.' 'Here you are, Nancy.' That's what he said. To me. In person. Mother, he said, 'Here you are, Nancy.' He used my name. 'Here you are, Nancy.' In person! Oh, you don't realize what it means! You can't understand what has happened to me! Back home we always said the one thing we wanted to see most of all in this life was Alan Ladd stripped to the waist. And there he was! *In the flesh!* 'Here you are, Nancy.' 'Here you are, Nancy.'"

I thought of calling Dr. Harry Cagney and having him operate, but after a while she seemed to improve slightly. That evening a miracle bloomed—she completely forgot to tune in Frankie's radio program. She was gone, gone into another world. Her report card for the following month was a fright. Her letters contained nothing but Alan Ladd talk.

Something had to be done about it.

The next time she came in to Hollywood I took her again to Paramount. We went on the set of *Going My Way*. Bing was there, garbed in cassock and Roman collar, looking about twenty-five years old. He was off on the side lines talking to a couple of Waves. Before long he excused himself and came over and I introduced him to my daughter. He talked to her for half an hour. He sang a little song for her, something about a mule. He asked her about high school. He asked her what songs she liked and he sang another one for her. Then Leo McCarey called him back to work and he abruptly kissed her good-by.

She was stumbling when I got her away from that sound stage. She had locomotor ataxia with chills.

Outside I found a bench and settled her onto it.

"Oh!" she sighed "Ohhh! Ohhhhhhhhhh! Those blue eyes! Ar that Voice! Oh, thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Oh, Daddy, love him!"

"What about Frankie?"

"Oh, pooh! Oh, Bing, Bing, Bing!"

"What about Alan Ladd?"

"Bing, Bing, Bing!" she repeated.

I had killed off Sinatra and in the process given her the Alan Ladd shakes Now I had killed off Ladd and she had the Crosby trembles But that was all right Paw sorta goes for Crosby himself.



## LESSON IN GAMBLING

I remember back when my son was about ten and we lived on the ground floor of a house on Long Island On this day I overheard a violent argument being conducted on the steps outside the front door I couldn't make out the nature of the issue involved, but before long my son came in and asked me for a nickel

"What do you want a nickel for?"

"To make a bet," he said

That was better More reasonable

"What's the bet?"

"Eddie," he said, referring to his friend from the apartment house across the street, "Eddie says he hit his grandmother with a blackjack last Tuesday and knocked her cold I bet him a nickel he didn't"

"How are you going to prove it?" I asked, reaching for a nickel. have sporting blood in my veins

"We're going up and talk to his grandmother," he said

"See if he'll go for a dime," I said "I'll take half of it" And I gave him a dime

After a while I heard more loud talk on the steps so I went to the door My son, with characteristic devotion to his old man, had forgotten about my share in the wager I called him inside

"Well?" I said

"We lost," he confessed He explained that he and Eddie had gone up to Eddie's home and confronted Grandma

"Did I or didn't I," Eddie asked her, "take a blackjack and hit me on the head with it last Tuesday and knock you cold?"

"His grandmother," reported my son, "said it was so, and she called him a bad name"

"Maybe she's in on the deal," I suggested. "Maybe she's taking a cut"

"I thought about that," he said, "so I told them I wanted proof. His grandmother showed me the bump on her head and then showed me the blackjack. It belongs to Eddie's mother."

I lost money on the transaction but I got a little contentment out of the knowledge that my own children had not yet started clouting their elders with blackjacks. I think I became a better father after that. My son didn't have to ask twice for a bicycle.



## CRISIS

One evening a solemn gentleman from a big publishing house came to call. He and I were sitting in the living room when my son walked in. I introduced them.

The boy drew back the corners of his mouth to their maximum spread, giving him the appearance of a goat trying to remove shreds of ham that were caught in his back teeth. He bounded forward, seized the guest's hand, gave it a powerful shake, and then grasped the visitor's shoulder with his left hand.

"How are you, old boy!" he roared, losing much of the effect through the fact that his voice was changing. "How's Africa?"

"Africa?" repeated my guest, his voice faltering.

"Did you see the big game country?" cried my offspring. "Thrilling! Tell me all about it!"

It was not overly warm in the room, and half an hour before he had appeared to be well and normal.

"Hey!" I interrupted. "What's got into you?"

He ignored me, still clinging to the man's hand, flashing that gargoylesque grin.

"Tell me about yourself," he said. Then, without waiting for my guest to tell about himself, he plunged onward. "You have beautiful hair. Do you put anything on it? When's your birthday?"

This was a staggering piece of behavior when you consider that the boy had, up to then, been reserved in the presence of company.

almost timid in meeting people. Something titanic had happened to him, and I found out what it was. That night I crept into his bedroom while he was asleep and found the answer on the table beside his bed. A book. On the cover was

THIS IS COPY NO 1697576 OF  
THE MOST POPULAR WORK OF NON-FICTION OF OUR TIME  
HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE  
BY DALE CARNEGIE

I came close to praying, close to falling on my knees and asking my Maker what I had done to deserve this. I resolved that I would wean him away from this thing or chloroform him and trust to the understanding of a jury. Surely they would look upon it as a mercy killing.

It took a bit of time and effort. He got so he would race to the telephone when it rang and sing out, in his changing voice, "Hello, there! Happy you called! Who is it, please?" He saved up his money until he was able to get a five dollar bill so he might practice one of the Carnegie precepts. Whenever he found himself getting critical of someone, whenever any problem of conduct presented itself, he would pull out the bill, look at the portrait on it, and say "How would Lincoln have handled this problem?"

He went up and down the streets of the neighborhood collecting with dozens of people he scarcely knew, having resolved to send little notes of congratulation to them on their anniversaries.

I bought puzzles, games, other books, striving to get him away from No 1697576. A basketball did the trick. I got him a full-sized basketball. He nailed up hoops in his bedroom and each evening I'd in Eddie, the boy who knocked his grandmother cold with his mother's blackjack. They played basketball by the hour, and the jumping and bumping and crashing was music to my ears and I never complained once about the wrecked furniture and the scarred poster of the walls.





**BRIEF COURSE IN  
JOURNALISM**





## GLAMOR

Twenty years is not such a long time to a carp, because a carp lives to be one hundred fifty and doesn't worry much, being just as dumb at the age of one hundred forty-nine as he was at the age of two. Twenty years is, however, a long time in my estimation, for it represents the period I spent as a newspaperman.

During the first ten years I suffered from the common delusion that it was romantic and full of high adventure. Today I regard it as about as exciting as the melancholy stuff that comes out of an oboe. I have many friends who remain in the newspaper business and who believe that it is noble and heroic and honest. The thing baffles me just as much as it baffles me to see people standing in line waiting to have some feeble-headed ex-waitress foretell their future by the manner in which tea leaves settle into a cup. And I grow wary of those guys who used to be newspapermen themselves and who slobber into their beer about the good old days.



## QUALIFICATION

When I was five years old I fell head downward into an empty cistern and was not found until six hours later, at which time I was quietly eating dirt. The year after that I fell out of a neighbor's barn, loft. These experiences constitute an adequate preparation for a career in journalism—the equivalent of four years in college.



## **OBITS**

There were three undertaking parlors in Huntington, and I had to visit each of them twice daily. The composition of obituary notices and funeral reports was a simple matter, all done by formula, and the important part of the job was to get the correct spelling of names. *Hell hath no fury like that of an honorary pall-bearer whose name has been misspelled in the newspaper*



## **THE SECRET**

Newspaper shops, large and small, accumulate fantastic personalities and weird behavior patterns. I once knew a Washington newspaperman who suffered from the delusion that Herbert Hoover had bladders on his feet. The first time I met him we were fellow passengers aboard the ill-starred Morro Castle in its maiden run from Newport News to New York. He kept calling me aside, telling me he had an important piece of inside information to give me if I'd promise not to print it. Then he would reconsider and decide to nurse his great secret for a while longer.

At last he came to my stateroom and after looking up and down the corridor to see that he had not been followed he stepped quickly inside, closed and locked the door and announced that he was ready to spill it.

"Herbert Hoover has bladders on his feet," he said, spacing the words out for emphasis.

"No!" I exclaimed.

"It's the God's truth," he said.

"How do you know he has bladders on his feet?" I demanded, pretending to be skeptical in the face of such a staggering statement.

"I saw 'em," he said with finality.

He extracted a promise from me that I would neither print this

intelligence nor speak of it to a living soul, then he went his way. Subsequently his friends on the ship told me that he had recurrent spells of this nature and that the delusion was always the same—Herbert Hoover had bladders on his feet—and you could take it or leave it. Beyond this little eccentricity, the man was a very capable Washington correspondent, able, no doubt, to forecast electoral votes with an error margin of only 60 per cent



## IN THE BACK ROOM

Late one afternoon I walked into one of the undertaking parlors and found the front office deserted. By this time my identity was known around the place, so I poked about and finally saw a light shining through the crack of a door in the rear of the building. I walked back through two rows of caskets and pushed open the door of the little room where the light was burning.

I saw Joe Poore, the old embalmer, bending over the naked corpse of a little old man, a man with chin whiskers, a body that seemed extraordinarily white below his leathery face and clothed in nothing save socks and heavy work shoes.

"Come in," said Joe Poore. I swallowed a couple of times and moved into the room.

Joe was a big man whose face was always flushed and who wheezed noisily whenever he moved about. He was wheezing and puffing now as he made his way to the foot of the embalming bier.

"Charlie Miller," he said, indicating the body. "Farmer out near Markle. I've knowed him since he was a boy. Went to school with him. Out ridin' a hay tedder this mornin'. God damn horse run away with him. Wheel hit a rock. Threw Charlie off and broke his neck."

Through this disconnected narrative Joe busied himself removing Charlie Miller's shoes. As he pulled off the first sock he straightened up and glowered in the direction of the little farmer's head. Then he said

'Charlie, you old son of a bitch, why didn't you warsh your feet!'

True enough, Charlie Miller's feet were dirty—black dirty. But he had been working in the fields, and his dirty feet didn't shock me nearly so much as did Joe's behavior. But old Joe had to wash those feet and he was infuriated, cursing Charlie Miller with a fine Mid-western eloquence. While he cursed and sponged I edged toward the door and soon escaped to the street. I was sick.

This little experience made me ashamed of myself. After all, I was a reporter and I was supposed to be hard and unflinching. I decided that the best way to cure myself of this squeamishness would be to see Joe Poore at work more often. Before long I had even become a sort of helper to Joe, running the pump, handing him his tools and listening to his wonderful conversations with the dead. He knew everybody in the county and he loved to talk to them as he prepared them for the tomb.

"Bill," he would say to a corpse, "you never got it, did you? Never got all that money. That dirty son of a bitch wife of yours, she'll get it now, won't she, Bill?"

I learned a lot about people in that little room.

Joe Poore was a rabid Democrat, and it was a lovely experience to attend the embalming of a lifelong Republican at his hands. Contemplating an overdormant Republican Joe achieved oratorical heights not equaled even on the floor of the United States Senate. His cussing was impure beauty.



## IN CONFERENCE

IT

I came on duty at the Denver Post at eight o'clock in the morning. Bonfils arrived ten minutes later. There ensued each day a little drama that I shall never forget. The men's toilet was across the big room from Bonfils' private office. It contained six booths, three on either side of the room. Bonfils decided one day to have the doors taken off these booths—then a man could sit down and talk with the man or men across the way.

Precisely at eight-thirty each morning it was his custom to emerge briskly from his private office and cross the floor to the men's room. It was always fun to watch the minor executives as soon as the clock reached eight twenty-five. One by one they would leave their desks and head for the can. Then at eight thirty Bonfils would cross the room. There was always a scramble for five of the booths, but one of the center positions was left open for the boss.

He would enter and cry out, "Good morning!"

"Good morning, boss!"—from five booths. Then he would take his place, and production of the day's newspaper would be officially under way.



## BOSQUET VS WHIPPLE

Both Jean Bosquet and Sidney Whipple were reporters on the Denver Post staff. Whipple is a little man and Bosquet is twice his size. As I remember it, Whipple was writing a story one day when Bosquet came along and picked up his first sheet of copy.

"Listen, Sid," he said, "why don't you put the lead on——"

"Put that down!" said Sid.

That was the beginning. They quit speaking, and pretty soon they were saying nasty things about each other, and it was inevitable that the thing should soon reach a grand climax of some sort. Provocation followed provocation, and at last Bosquet announced one night in the Denver Press Club that he was going to maim Whipple, who declared that if Bosquet ever laid a hand on him he, Whipple, would kick Bosquet in the crotch till he bled.

Bosquet sent a courier to Whipple, challenging him to a death grapple at the Press Club on the following evening. Whipple returned word that he'd be there at nine o'clock and that Bosquet should get right with God.

All these flamboyant negotiations were carried on with the aid of certain stimulants distilled from sugar beets, but when the next day dawned, both men knew that there had to be a fight that night.

Obviously Whipple was no match for Bosquet—it would be

much the same as putting Roy Howard in a ring with Joe Louis. So Whipple took steps. He decided to hire a proxy. He approached Barney Cohen, a stalwart young man employed in the Post's reference department. Barney was as big as Jean Bosquet, if not bigger. Sid came to the point at once. He would be willing to engage Barney as a mercenary—pay him money to fight Bosquet. They haggled a bit, then settled on ten dollars cash plus whatever medical expenses might be incurred. The compact was made.

Came ten o'clock that night at the Press Club. Most of the Post staff had assembled in the club lounge. Bosquet was there, brooding over the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of Sid Whipple, speaking of his sorrow that he should have to do this thing to Whipple's family.

Then the front door opened. In came Barney Cohen and behind him, almost hidden from view, was Sid Whipple. They proceeded to the center of the room. The rest of us formed a big circle and inside the circle a fantastic conference took place. It was all done in dead pan. Sid announced that he had hired Barney Cohen to fight for him, adding that if Bosquet was any kind of a man he'd accept the situation. Bosquet was in a fury—so much of a fury, in fact, that he did accept it.

The entire company adjourned to the alley at the rear of the Press Club. Automobiles were brought up to furnish floodlights. Bosquet and Barney Cohen removed their shirts, squared off, and then ripped into each other. It was a beautiful fight. They slugged and grunted and bled and slugged and bled and cursed, and all that time little Sid Whipple was scampering around at the very border of the battle, crying

"Hit 'im, Barney! Kill the son of a bitch!"

They fought for a good twenty minutes and neither man gave ground. By that time, however, they were both exhausted. Suddenly they stopped slugging and fell into each other's arms, sobbing. We led the gladiators back into the club and there were drinks all around, and then more drinks all around, and more after that, and pretty soon Bosquet and Whipple were hanging on each other and vowing eternal friendship.



‘Jean, old pal,’ Sid Whipple was saying, “if you’ll only do one thing for me. Sing ‘The Rosary.’ You sing it lovelier than anybody on earth.”

‘So with Whipple at the piano, Bosquet sang “The Rosary.” It was—particularly after all that juice of the sugar beet—one of the most touching scenes I have ever witnessed.



## AN INDIANA PRINTER

We were a daffy bunch around the old Huntington Press. I was the baby of the family, while at the other end of the age scale the patriarch of the tribe was John Darl. John was a linotype operator with a wolf complex. A wolf complex, back in those days, was not the same as a wolf complex today. John Darl saw wolves where other men could see nothing. And he saw wolves before he went on drinking sprees. He would come into the office, look significantly at everyone in the newsroom, and then say:

“Saw a wolf today.”

There was nothing sinister or dramatic in his manner as he said it. He simply announced that he had seen a wolf, just as other people might mention the weather, a crick in the back, or the price of side meat.

Having said it, John Darl would pass on into the composing room and we, in the newsroom, would look at one another and grin. John Darl was ready for another brannigan. He would be orry-eyed before nightfall.

John had another peculiarity beyond his ability to see wolves. He was one of the few men I’ve ever known who actually enjoyed the ministrations of a barber. He was the world’s champion barberee. The day seldom passed that he did not make at least one trip to the barber. For all I know he never ate, and his salary seemed to be equally allocated between barbers and bootleggers, You can imagine how he smelled.



## FIT TO PRINT

There's a point about newspaper work that I've never seen discussed in print before—the weight of all the prejudices that go into the making of a newspaper story. Let us suppose that I have settled myself at my typewriter in the city room, prepared to compose an account of an interview. Do I think of the ultimate consumer? Do I think of the man or woman for whom this whole enterprise, in theory, is designed? Do I think of the guy who's going to lay down his three pennies for a copy of the paper? Faugh! If there is such a word

I think first of the newspaper's general policies and then I think of the advertising department. After that I contemplate the personalities of the seven or eight men who might possibly handle my copy once it is finished. There are four assistant city editors. My story will pass through the hands of two and maybe three of them. I can't tell which of the four will get his hands on my masterpiece, so I must consider all of them. One is an ex sailor, and if I can manage to work in some mention of a ship or the sea, he'll get out of his chair and whop me on the back and tell me it was a grand piece. Woe betide me, however, if I misuse a nautical term.

Move on to the next fellow. He's a veteran of the First World War. Get something of a military nature into the story and he'll smile and say it's fine, just fine. If at all possible, drop a little compliment for the gallant men of the American Legion, and he'll go to bat and demand a banner head for the piece. And the next guy. A complete nut about flowers and gardening. Get some flowers into the copy somehow if only in a couple of similes, but get 'em right. Don't use such obvious things as roses or violets. Go look up a couple of good ones, and he'll beam all over the place and maybe, two or three days later, let you off work an hour early.

Now we come to the fourth man. He married a registered nurse and he fancies himself an authority on medical matters. He is a font of misinformation on the ills of the human body and I have seen

him, in ten minutes' time, come close to killing men suffering from a common cold or a beer hangover. So, for this one, work in a medical term or two and he's in the bag.

The copy goes now to the news editor. He is an authority on the Far East and on aviation. Get one or the other or both into the story, somehow, even if you have to drag them in clumsily. Put the word "Orient" or "Oriental" somewhere in a paragraph and the moment he sees it, he'll mark the piece down for a good position in the paper and send it along to the copy desk slot man—meaning the man at the head of the copy desk. Here's a tough one. This guy's hobby is collecting and reading the works of George Jean Nathan. If you can mention George Jean Nathan in your story—a difficult thing to puzzle out sometimes—he'll write "Don't trim" at the top of your essay, toss it to a copyreader, then come straight to you and regale you with quotations from the works of Nathan.

As for the copyreaders—well, any one of perhaps a dozen might get your story. It's useless to carry the precautionary campaign beyond the George Jean Nathan man. Needless to say, all the copyreaders hate and despise George Jean Nathan and would throttle him on sight, simply because they have to sit there all day and listen to their immediate superior babble about George Jean Nathan. If you manage to get George Jean Nathan into your copy, the slot man will issue orders that the story is not to be cut, but those copyreaders will figure out some way of messing it up without appearing to butcher it. And they are almost all of them, men with bitterness in their hearts and prejudices pouring out of their ears. They sometimes develop colossal hatred for a single word or phrase. I once knew a copyreader who suffered from a peculiar phobia. He could not bear the sight of the word "ergo." Whenever "ergo" popped up in a piece of copy in his hands, he would scream like a water buffalo brought to childbed, rip the paper to shreds, hurl his scissors and paste pot to the floor, knock over his chair, and start kicking the metal cabinet containing the atlases. I used to put "ergo" into stories now and then just for the pleasure of watching him run amuck.

So, what do we have here? If the story I write is handled tact-

fully, if it is written in such a manner that it will pass unscathed straight through to the copyreader, it will be a composition containing mention of the might of the merchant marine, the glory of the American Legion, the beauty of rare blossoms, the magnificence of the modern tonsillectomy, the mystery of the Orient, the horsepower of our fighting planes, and the wisdom of George Jean Nathan. To achieve this result is quite difficult when writing, say, an interview with Lana Turner.

I neglected to mention that as the author of the article in question I might conceivably have a few million prejudices myself and that I would be inclined to pile as many of them as possible into my copy. Newspapermen do have prejudices.



## THE FIRST DRINK

Before I have done with the subject of bibbing I want to set down a confession. It is a confession made and rendered in the interests of historical accuracy. It is undertaken with a humility that amounts almost to shame, for it involves the admission that I once double-crossed a good friend.

Some months ago that amiable codger Benjamin DeCasseres chose to recall in his newspaper column certain events that took place on the twelfth floor of the Waldorf Astoria on the afternoon of December 5, 1533.

Mr. DeCasseres wrote with unconcealed personal pride and with a total disregard for true facts. There are two reasons why truth was abused in his essay. In the first place, he does not know and could not possibly remember, with any degree of clarity, precisely what happened that afternoon of December 5, 1533. And in the second place, it would be well nigh impossible for him to know the truth. For ten long years Benjamin DeCasseres has been living a lie.

A week prior to that December day in 1533 it came to my attention that Prohibition was approaching its end in the United States. I was then employed as a feature writer in the New York offices of the United Press. I knew that I would be called upon to write some

sort of fancy report on the death of Prohibition, so I cooked up a stunt.

With the facilities of the United Press at my command, I decided to make it possible for a single individual, selected in advance, to take the first legal drink swallowed in the United States of America in thirteen years. I wanted to get H. L. Mencken for the enterprise but Mr. Mencken, who leans to beer, was in Baltimore. Then I thought of Ben DeCasseres, whose home I frequently visited and who was always fond of discussing his alcoholic capacity.

Mr. DeCasseres fairly leaped at the chance to make history, get a free drink, and get his name in the newspapers. I arranged for him to meet me at the Waldorf-Astoria immediately after lunch on December 5.

Before going to the hotel myself I had to check all the arrangements. The end of Prohibition was to be accomplished in Salt Lake City where the Utah Constitutional Convention was voting that day to ratify the Twenty-first Amendment, which repealed the Eighteenth Amendment. Ratification by three fourths of the states was necessary, and Utah was the thirty-sixth state to vote.

The United Press had, of course, a direct wire from the Salt Lake City convention hall into its offices in New York. I arranged to have another wire set up between the office on Forty-second Street and a room in the Waldorf-Astoria. The flash would come from Salt Lake City to New York and then would be swiftly relayed to us in the hotel suite and Mr. DeCasseres would hurl the first legal drink down his hatch. A telegraph operator was installed in the hotel suite and at the other end of the wire, in the United Press office, sat Alfred D. Greene, night wire chief of the United Press. Mr. Greene was to relay the flash to the hotel the instant it bounced off the wire from Utah.

I had a brief whispered conversation with Al Greene before I left the office for the hotel.

Arriving at the Waldorf suite, I found Mr. DeCasseres with an illegal highball in his hand and an expression of beatific abandon on his face. The hotel management had agreed to furnish a bottle of liquor for the stunt, but a marvelous mistake had been made

somewhere along the line and an entire case of scotch stood on the floor beside a divan.

Mr. DeCasseres and I, with two hours to go before the flash from Utah was due, began making inroads on that scotch. After a while Mr. C. V. R. Thompson, New York correspondent for the *London Daily Express*, telephoned and asked if he might chisel in on the stunt. He wanted to have Mr. DeCasseres interviewed, over the transatlantic telephone, by one of the editors of his paper in London. I agreed to this, being already in an expansive frame of mind, and before long Mr. Thompson joined us and was assigned to a bottle of scotch, at which he began taking heroic belts.

The telegraph operator was making a show of testing the hookup with Al Greene, but I could see him casting envious glances at us, so he was invited into the party. Mr. DeCasseres, who once described himself as an intellectual faun, was in good form, as he usually is, and was making an effort to remember how many times he had been hurled bodily out of Jack's restaurant in the old days.

Around four-thirty the brass sounder began chattering and Al Greene informed us that the Utah delegates had assembled and that the flash would be upon us within the next ten minutes. Having given us this warning Mr. Greene telegraphed an off-the-record query:

"Have them bums started drinking yet? Wish I was there."

The telegraph operator was in his place at the table and Mr. Thompson began putting his call through to London. Mr. DeCasseres sat across the room in an overstuffed chair and said:

"Whose house are we in? The bounty of the Lord! Columbia, the gem of the ocean! God giveth and God taketh away! Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord! Hard work never hurt anybody!"

I directed Mr. DeCasseres to the chair he was to occupy during the historic ceremony. He was across the table from the telegraph operator. The London connection had been completed and a telephone was placed in Mr. DeCasseres' left hand. He began talking to the British editor as though the transatlantic telephone were a fake and a fraud, as though he were actually shouting across the

bosom of the sea. I fixed him a fresh highball and another for myself.

We settled into our assigned places. Off to one side stood Ted Saucier, of the Waldorf staff, wondering if he hadn't made a horrible mistake by permitting such goings on in these austere precincts. I stood directly behind Mr DeCasseres. Mr Thompson was at his side and had taken the telephone away from him.

"In a few moments," Mr Thompson was saying into the instrument, "we shall have the flash from Utah. Then Mr DeCasseres shall take the first drink, and then I shall put Mr DeCasseres on the wire for the interview."

It was 4 39 P M. We were all tensely quiet, though weaving a little. Then the telegraph instrument sounded.

Click pause. Click pause. Click.

Unobtrusively I raised my glass to my lips and took a long swig. At once the instrument broke into a chatter.

"Flash!" yelled the operator. "Prohibition repealed!"

Mr DeCasseres drank—drank fiercely, pouring part of the highball over his chin. He put down his glass and Mr Thompson handed him the telephone.

"Hurrah for Tom Paine!" cried Mr DeCasseres across the ocean. "This is the second Declaration of Independence! Bang the field-piece, twang the lyre! Whoooooopeece! Gimmy another drink, boys, I'm thirsty!"

The man in London tried to get in some questions but Mr DeCasseres wouldn't stop. He was bursting with patriotic fervor and international brotherhood. He spoke feelingly of Thomas Jefferson, George Bernard Shaw, Wayne B. Whelan, and the Gaekwar of Baroda. He declared his personal love for all the peoples of the world and scotch whisky. He was still going when Mr Thompson wrenched the telephone from him and rang off to save money.

After that I had to write a report of the affair for immediate use on the United Press wires. It was not the most intelligible piece ever written but it had words in it. When I had finished with it, we sat around and had some more scotch, and then I had to return to the United Press offices to write a story for the night wires.

I left Mr. DeCasseres trying to remember for Mr. Thompson and a couple of visitors—Lou Wedemar and Forrest Davis—the number of times he had been thrown out of Jack's in the old days.

So that is actually what happened on the afternoon of December 5, 1933, in the Waldorf-Astoria. Mr. DeCasseres never suspected that he had been double-crossed. He could not know that when the telegraph instrument clicked three times, those clicks were a signal to me. Al Greene was telling me that the flash had come in, that Utah had voted, that Prohibition was no more. Al Greene was giving me the better part of a second to quietly take the first legal drink. And I took it.



## BULLDOG AT WORK

Years after the Rex Beach interview the head of the National City Bank in New York, Charles E. Mitchell, got himself involved with a series of mathematical troubles, none of which made any sense to me, and finally was indicted in a case concerned with income-tax matters. Here was one of the great how-the-mighty-have-fallen stories, and on the evening of the day Mr. Mitchell appeared in court, my boss sent me to his house for the purpose of interviewing him.

The Mitchell home was one of those white-front mansions on Fifth Avenue opposite Central Park, and when I got there, a press photographer was loafing around across the street. I asked him if Mr. Mitchell had come home yet and he said he didn't know. I went to the front door, hoping to God that Mr. Mitchell had not.

After a couple of nervous punches at the bell, the door opened and a man, obviously not a butler, stood before me.

"Is Mr. Mitchell at home?" I squeaked.

"No," said the man.

I knew it was Mr. Mitchell in person. Anybody would have known it since his photographs had been plastered through the newspapers for days on end.



"Well," I fumbled, "that's too bad."

"Yes, it is," he said.

"Do you expect him?" I asked

"Who are you?" demanded Mr Mitchell

"I'm a reporter from the United Press and I'd like—I mean—that is, I came up to try to interview Mr Mitchell, but if he isn't——"

"He's not home," said Mr Mitchell, "and we don't expect him home for weeks "

"Well, in that case I guess I'll go on back "

"While you're at it," he said, "you can tell that photographer across the street he's wasting his time "

"Yes sir "

"You work for Karl Bickel, don't you?" said Mr Mitchell Karl Bickel was then head of the United Press

"That's right," I said

"Well, when you see him, tell him I said hello "

"Sure I'll tell him Tell him you said hello "

"Yes," he said "Tell him Charlie said hello "

"Yes sir," I said "Thank you "

He gave me a grin and then closed the door, and I went out and told the photographer and then went on back to the office Dopey, wasn't I? But not too dopey I wasn't dumb enough to go back and tell Karl Bickel that Charlie said hello



## OPPOSITION

The *Journal* is the only newspaper in Rapid City No opposition. That's the way it was in so many towns and small cities we visited, and it came as a shock to me In my time as a newspaperman there was always opposition In my day if we had got wind of that gypsy woman we'd have worked fast—we'd have had that story today. And if we didn't get it today there'd be hell to pay, for likely as not the opposition paper would beat us to it before tomorrow A newspaper without opposition is like a football team with nobody to

play against, not even a row of tackling dummies. We visited town after town to find the local newspaper operating without opposition. In many cases there were two papers, but they were functioning under the same ownership. Sometimes they made a pretense of rivalry, but I always had the feeling that it was make believe. In a number of cities we observed the workings of another modern development in journalism—the mechanical consolidation. Two newspapers occupy the same building, use the same composing room, the same presses, the same business office, the same advertising department—but they have separate editorial departments. Maybe one editor is Republican, while down the hall the other is Democratic. I talked to editors involved in consolidations of this type, and they said the rivalry between the editorial staffs was just as sharp as it had always been. “We fight like cats and dogs,” one of them said. “We don’t speak to each other in the elevators,” said another. “We try to beat each other to death with exclusives,” I was told. Maybe. But to me it’s a game of tiddly winks played with soft chips.



## THE LONDON TIMES

Ever since I arrived in England, people have been telling me that I should not permit the newspapers to give me a false impression of London and Londoners, they say that I’ve likely been reading the wrong papers. The fact is, I’ve been consistently reading them all, including *The Times*. This newspaper can drive an American crackers just as quickly as the others. Today, for example, *The Times* devotes its celebrated Fourth Leader to a discussion of the stir caused by the Big Show broadcast, with special reference to the antiquity of jokes. The writer cites one as follows:

I saw you with a lady last night  
That was not a lady, she was my wife

“Jokes of that vintage,” comments *The Times*, “enjoy perpetual, if intermittent youth. They depend on the inimitable expression,

## BRIEF COURSE IN JOURNALISM

the delicious disarming gestures with which they are accompanied.

That's the liveliest bit of business I've seen in *The Times* for days. The paper deals in dignity. There exist whole battalions of anecdotes reflecting the ponderosity of this stately organ. Once an elephant broke away from a circus and terrorized Brixton for half an hour. The story reached *The Times* and came into the hands of a subeditor. He considered it briefly, decided it lacked dignity, and spiked it. Thereafter he was always known as "the man who spiked the elephant." He was looked upon with some contempt by other journalists, but not by the proprietors of *The Times*, they knew he was a fellow of substantial worth and proper instincts—a good cove to have round.

Another famous story involves a *Times* leader writer. In the old days, the story goes, the *Times* leader writers were assigned their subjects, then each man was locked into his room with a bottle of wine and imprisoned there until he had finished his essay. This one particular writer sent out for more wine, and more after that, and the bottles were handed into the room, and everyone stood by expecting the delivery of a masterpiece. When nothing had been heard from the man for hours, his door was unlocked and the editors found him slumped across his desk and beneath his hand a sheet of white paper containing the single word "Notwithstanding."



## THE STOLEN DREAM

The one salient characteristic of a newspaperman's lying is theft of material. He doesn't invent his lies—he steals them. Let me illustrate.

Eight or ten years ago the Chinese actress Anna May Wong arrived in New York from Europe and, as was the custom in those olden times, she was greeted at Quarantine by a group of reporters. They asked her all manner of questions about conditions on the Continent, and she gave them a few gay anecdotes. The interview was concluded and the gentlemen of the press departed in quest of

other celebrities on the boat. One fellow, however, hung behind. When he and Miss Wong were alone, he said

"Uh, Miss Wong, uh, well, you see, there was—I mean, uh, well, Miss Wong, to be frank about it, there was one other thing I wanted to ask you, and—"

Miss Wong smiled and didn't give him a chance to finish.

"It's not true," she said

I have heard no less than six different newspapermen tell that story and every one of them told it as having happened to himself. I'm pretty sure that the adventure actually belongs to John McClain, yet he is not one of the six I've heard claiming it

The public, or part of the public at least, has long had the notion that newspapermen are romantic adventurers, and newspapermen seem to suffer the delusion worse than anyone else. Since the time of Richard Harding Davis there has been a tendency to associate newspapermen with the adjective "picaresque." The association is not too farfetched. The dictionary defines picaresque as of, pertaining to, or characteristic of, rogues or rascals.

When newspapermen get into the society of other people, at parties or other social functions, they sometimes get the itch to glamorize themselves. They seem to feel that it's expected of them, so they start telling lies. They appropriate stories belonging to other newspapermen, casting themselves as protagonist in each of the stolen dramas. I've stolen stories belonging to other reporters and I've had stories stolen from me. I'll never forget the time I had a dream stolen from me.

A dozen years ago that ex harum scarum redhead, Henry McLemore, was one of my close friends. Henry was, and is, among the most eloquent of all God's creatures that possess mouths. He and I contributed in many ways to the public misconception of newspapermen. We worked together at the United Press, with offices in the *Daily News* building in New York. The *News* building has a circular lobby, featuring a huge terrestrial globe. This lobby is usually crowded with tourists, and Henry and I sometimes gave them a little show. We were young and gay then.

We'd come up Forty second Street and enter the lobby through

the main entrance I'd come through the revolving door first, spinning the thing like a top. I'd have the brim of my hat turned up in front, a wad of paper in my left hand, a pencil in my right. As I charged into the lobby, I'd cry out.

"Gangway! Scoop! Scoop! Scoop!"

Then I'd rush through the bug-eyed tourists, toward the elevators, and into the lobby would come Henry, equipped the same as I had been and screaming

"Stop the press! Stop the press! Stop the press!"

Henry and I were friends for a long time, but we drifted apart, and sometimes I think it was all because of my error in telling him about a dream I'd had

It was a dream concerning two newspapermen named Ferguson and Morris. In the dream Ferguson and Morris quit the newspaper business and opened a pet shop. I went into the shop to offer them my best wishes for success and they immediately began showing off their specialty—the Bouncing Interchangeable Pussy Pups. Ferguson reached into a cage and pulled out a kitten. Remember, now, I'm still dreaming

"Suppose," he said, "you want a kitten. All right. You got a kitten—a nice, fluffy, grade A kitten such as this kitten I hold in my hand. But suppose you want a dog for a change. Now, watch it closely."

He threw the kitten to the floor, just as if it were a tennis ball. It bounced like a tennis ball, too, but when it came back to his hand it was no longer a kitten—it was a tiny pup. Another bounce, as he quickly demonstrated, changed the pup back into a kitten.

In the dream I told Ferguson and Morris that they had a mighty neat article there, a nice piece of merchandise, and I even bought one—on time

That was the extent of the dream. As I said, I told it to Henry McLeMore the next day and he said it was as pretty a dream as he'd heard tell about in years. He began telling me about how he dreamed in serials—continued stories which picked up each night where they had left off the night before. I never suspected the larceny that lay in his black heart.

One day, perhaps a week after that, I was sitting in a tavern with a radio producer. We were waiting for Henry McLemore.

"Did Henry tell you about his dream?" the radioman asked.

Little suspecting what was to follow, I said he had not.

"Darnedest dream I ever heard of," he went on. And he proceeded to tell my dream of the Bouncing Interchangeable Pussy Pups. It was exactly as I had dreamed it, save that Henry had improved the utility of the Pussy Pups. The kitten turned into a pup on the first bounce, all right. But after that, the way Henry McLemore was spreading the dream around, the pup could be hurled to the floor and would bounce back as a ripe cantaloupe.

I listened to this tale of bald faced thievery and said nothing whatever until Henry himself joined us. Then I flung it in his face.

"Henry," I said, "you stole my dream."

"What dream?" he demanded.

"My dream," I said. "My dream about the Bouncing Interchangeable Pussy Pups. You stole it, you dirty rat!"

I was astounded at his reaction. Right in front of that radio producer he had the effrontery to turn the accusation back against me.

"Your dream!" he cried. "What do you mean, your dream? That's my dream. I dreamed it. I never heard tell of such a thing. Trying to steal my dream from me. You know damn well I dreamed that dream and told you about it. I'll certainly never tell you another one of my dreams!"

I was so mad that I got up and walked out of the place. I stewed for a week. How was I going to get back proprietary right to that dream? How was I going to establish, before the world, beyond all doubt, that the Bouncing Interchangeable Pussy Pup dream was mine and mine alone?

Then the grim and bitter truth came in upon me. I would never be able to prove anything. The law of our land does not provide a shred of protection against the evil depredations of a dream thief. No jury on earth would ever be able to say, conclusively, whether Henry McLemore dreamed that dream, or whether I dreamed it. I had no witnesses.



## NORMALCY

Small aberrations, as I said, are commonplace in the profession. A few years ago one of New York's best known feature writers developed an obsession over turtle eggs. He always carried a small box of the rubbery eggs in his pocket and almost any evening he could be found at his favorite bar solemnly bouncing a turtle egg beside his highball.

Occasionally he would pick up a turtle egg between thumb and forefinger as if it were a priceless pearl, hold it aloft for all to see and cry out

"Here lies the last hope of the human race!"

He now writes for the radio.

When I worked on the Denver Post one of the reporters was a former instructor in Greek at Harvard. Periodically he would walk into the office of the publisher, Frederick G. Bonfils, and demand a ten dollar pay cut. Bonfils, who was world's champion pincher of pennies, reacted in a peculiar manner to these requests. A man who would demand a cut in salary, to his way of thinking, was openly flouting one of Nature's first laws. He refused to consider the pay cut.

"Well, then, Mr. Bonfils," the reporter would plead, "if you can't do that please give me a five dollar cut."

Bonfils would not hear of it. Finally the reporter wrote a bitter note to the publisher, declaring that he could no longer hold his head up in public while drawing a greater salary than he was worth, and left town.

One evening I threw a chili party at my home and invited this same ex professor. He spent the entire evening waltzing with a straight back chair which he called Xanthippe. Whenever the phonograph stopped he'd go to it and feed it chili.

"The little thing needs sustenance," he would say. He jammed it full of chili, and it was never of any use after that. And when the evening was over I took him to the door. He was a dignified man,

and there was dignity in the arch of his neck as he glanced back into the room for a final affectionate look at Xanthippe. In parting, he said:

"I want you to know that I have had the finest time of my life tonight. And I want to compliment you on your chili. It was better than Childs'."



# THE HUMAN ANIMAL





## GENEALOGY

People who spend months and years and even decades exploring backward among billions of chromosomes which ultimately led to their own important selves are often subject to bitter ridicule, they are accused of the worst form of snobbery on earth—worship of family. They are bruised and berated by cynical individuals who argue that seventy five per cent of all humans have been villainous in one way or another, meaning that three fourths of a person's ancestors would be better forgotten. On the other hand, those who indulge in eager genealogical research defend themselves sometimes by describing their digging as a game, a quest, a form of sport. It is much the same, they say, as a game of golf, or the working out of a Double Crostic. There are spaces to be filled in, and the goal is to find the precise names that belong in those spaces. For my own part I would recommend leaving these people alone. If they were not preoccupied with their prowlings in the past, they might be out somewhere making trouble, subverting their government, suborning perjury, or committing mopey on a public highway.

The finished chart is a history of sorts, but there's no life in it. You get the names of sires and dams and all the foalings and the dates of births and marriages and deaths, and that's all. There is no mention of the one who got cidered up and goosed the preacher, the one who squandered his patrimony at the cribbage board, the one who slaughtered his wife, or built a bridge, or horsewhipped an editor, or wrote a poem, or treed a possum, or played the zither. In the realm of formal genealogy there seems to be no recogni-

'tion of achievement other than begetting The business of begetting is a wondrous enough sort of thing, but anybody can do it—even an idiot hog—and I've never been able to understand why a man, immediately his wife has a baby, goes around with a smirk on his face, with his chest puffed out like a Mongoloid pigeon, as if he had just built another Boulder Dam, or discovered a cure for the common cold, or got selected by the Literary Guild What did he do that was so much? What did he do that a Japanese beetle couldn't do better?

The thing we all want to know about a man is what he has done that sets him apart from the common run of men The Eldon (Mo ) Advertiser reports that a Westminster College student named William Smith found a six foot blacksnake that had swallowed a jar of mentholatum That boy is a far more interesting individual than Truman Smith who married Huldah Alling.



## REPUTATION

I was grateful, too, for the opportunity of meeting the girl who ate the doily This incident dates back quite a few years when the young lady in question was just blossoming into societyhood Her mama had taught her good manners and poise and she knew enough not to use guest towels in the homes of her friends Then she went to the fatal party Along toward the end of this affair plates of ice cream were passed around and, in each case, the chunk of ice cream rested on a fancy paper doily, which in turn rested on the plate Our young lady was likely very nervous and not thinking straight because she ate the ice cream and the doily. It has been more than twenty years since that party, and the benighted girl has become a wife and mother, but for purposes of identification she is still "The One, You Know, Who Ate the Doily." When she arrived at the Eldon reception she was no more than across the threshold when people began congregating around me and whispering excitedly, "Here she comes—the one, you know, who ate the doily." I suppose I could have asked her about it, but I didn't have

the heart. Surely she must know that people describe her as the doily-eater, and certainly it must bother her at times. I felt a little sorry for her, as I've always felt a little sorry for Richard Knight, the lawyer, who once stood on his head at opening night of the Metropolitan Opera. All he did was stand on his head—just once, one time. The thing has pursued him relentlessly ever since. His name pops into the newspapers periodically, something to do with a divorce, or a journey, or a society party, or a court case. Always it is the same—the news item begins “Richard Knight, the man who stood on his head at the Metropolitan Opera House, today was . . .”



## DIARIES

I have had some experience with the diaries of teen age girls. I've read perhaps a half dozen of them. Therein lies one of the advantages of being a writer. A girl's diary is a sacred thing and not for alien eyes, yet whenever I've been able to get my hands on one I've read it, excusing my violation of ethics by saying to myself, “I'm a writer, and a writer has got to find out what goes on in the minds of human beings—it's perfectly all right for me to read this.” It has been my experience that the girls who write these intimate journals are usually careless about leaving them lying around. Friends of my daughter, for example, would come to the house for a visit, always bringing their diaries and always leaving them someplace where stinkers could get at them. I recall one in which every daily entry ended with this line: “So good nite, dear diary, and if anybody reads this they will fry in hell.”

The theme of all these diaries was the same: boys. Love for boys and then hatred for boys followed by greater love for boys.



## ETHNOCENTRISM

If there is any word in any language which describes what is wrong with the world, this is it. Because of ethnocentrism I have abandoned all planning for a placid future. The dictionary defines ethnocentrism as follows:

"The belief in the inherent superiority of one's own group and culture accompanied by a feeling of contempt for other groups and cultures."

There, in a single word, is the tragedy of the human race—my personal tragedy as well as yours. My father can lick your father. My religion is better than your religion and phooey on your religion. My kindergarten is better than your kindergarten. My college is better than your college and shut up or I'll smash yer baggage, mister. My town is better than your town. My county is better than your county. My state is better than your state. My country is better than your country, and if you give me any lip about it, I'll knock your goddamn block off. I think maybe I'll knock your goddamn block off anyway, just on general principles.

That's the way the world is, and the disease of ethnocentrism is incurable. I've always, in the past, been cynical about people who spend their time yearning for the good old days, but now there seems to be a point in favor of that yearning. There used to be a time, not very long ago, when a man could move himself and his family into a house on a hill and say: "This is where I stay—this is where I spend my remaining years—and my children after me." No more I've got my spiked shoes handy to the doorway and alongside them a road map so I can make speed when the earth begins to shake. That addition I wanted to build to the house, so I could have a pool table and another bedroom—nuts to all that. Just keep those spikes filed sharp on the running shoes—even though it'll do nobody any good to run. My dog is a better dog than my neighbor's dog, but you know what my neighbor says? He say his dog is better

than my dog! The big dumb bastard! He comes around here casting slights on my dog, and I'll hit him with an ax.



## STAYING WITH RELATIVES

Before we started out for the Midwest we decided that we would not stay in the homes of any relatives, that in every town we visited we would live in a local hotel

Both my wife and I have strong feelings on this point. Staying at the homes of relatives and friends generally makes for acute discomfort for all concerned. A housewife, when she hits the road, should be done with the worries of housework until she gets back home. And unless her relatives are wealthy and keep a stable of hired help, she's going to do housework along the way. It's inevitable unless she happens to be both lazy and indifferent to the opinion of her kin-folks.

Suppose you go to visit relatives in, say, Cedar Rapids. A bedroom is assigned to you, if a spare is available. Or it may be that somebody in the family gives up his or her room and sleeps on the divan in the living room, or on a pallet, or in the attic, or the basement, or even goes over to the neighbor's where they have a spare bedroom. I, for one, would not be a bit comfortable in such circumstances, knowing that I had bounced someone out of his bed.

Now. You are in Cousin Joe's comfortable bed and Cousin Joe is strung up between two trees in the side yard, occupying a hammock. You get up in the morning. A conscientious woman, a woman with just a snifter of pride, is going to spread up the bed, and not leave it to Aunt Myrtle, who certainly has enough to do with the cooking. So the wife of the visiting team sets to work. Downstairs Aunt Myrtle is fixing breakfast—so the wife hurries down and a cheerful colloquy follows. Like this:

WIFE: "I'll set the table"

AUNT: "Oh no you *will* not! You march right into that living room and set yourself down. Things'll be ready in a jiffy."

WIFE: "Now, Aunt Myrtle, I insist. Here, let me slice the baloney."

AUNT: "Put that knife down! Now scat outa here! Go on in and turn on the radio. The morning paper's on the piano."

The wrangling goes on all day. After breakfast the visitor just insists on helping clear the table and washing or wiping (nowadays called "drying") the dishes, and there are two more meals to go, with the action and dialogue repeated through every operation connected with the cooking and serving of them.

The visiting wife certainly doesn't want to spread up the bed or set the table or slice the baloney or help with the dishes, she'd far, far rather be in a comfortable hotel, having breakfast in her room—a breakfast that wouldn't include sliced baloney, having people come and get the dishes and carry them away, and more people come and spread up the bed and empty the ash trays and sweep the floor and clean up the bathroom—a bathroom which is her own for the time being, where she has a reasonable chance of gaining admittance. She has gone on a trip to escape from housework, to have a vacation from it, and here she is at Aunt Myrtle's working most of the day because it is polite to do so, traditionally polite, and she'd be looked upon as a poor wife, a woman who hadn't been properly fetched up, if she didn't do it. And Aunt Myrtle—she, too, is wishing secretly that these people were at the hotel because they've upset the entire household, and Joe will probably catch his death in that hammock, and that slovenly bum from New York simply insists on dropping cigarette ashes on the carpets and uses up all the hot water taking shower baths so a body can't get the dishes washed, and My God the grocery bill I'm gonna have after this is over. But Aunt Myrtle is bound by convention, too, and a week ago was bellowing her insistence that they stay at her home, and even said she didn't want them to come to Cedar Rapids if they insulted her by staying in a hotel. Her motive, of course, and the motives of all who resemble her, was a simple one. What would the neighbors say if her relatives came to town and stayed in a hotel!

We wrote to all relatives whose towns we expected to visit and told them in strongly worded prose how we felt about it, and said



we would strike their towns off our itinerary if we couldn't stay in hotels.

Such a ruckus as followed! Such whooping and hollering and hysterical indignation! We had insulted them! My mother and my wife's mother had extensive conniptions and mentioned all the pain and sorrow they had suffered in bearing us and bringing us up. The others wrote letters of impassioned protest, and some even telephoned long distance to say they'd never heard of such a thing in their lives. Finally we decided to yield in the case of the mothers, but nowhere else.



## THE FIRST TIME

Ask any normal male of the human species to tell you about his first time. On second thought, don't bother asking him; he'll tell it to you eventually in large detail without the slightest urging. Almost always he'll begin it with, "I was twelve years old at the time and . . ." Twelve is the preferential age in these personal narratives, though sometimes the story begins, "I was nine years old at the time and . . ." There are authenticated instances in which the narrator has boldly set his age at seven, and even six. The tendency with the individual is to reduce the age with each re-telling for the simple reason that the listener, if he be a normal male of the human species, will respond by undercutting the narrator. If our specimen male says he was eleven, his audience is likely to interrupt with, "Hell, I was only nine!" Consequently the narrator reduces the age with each telling of the tale. Where formerly his companion in the big adventure was a pretty teacher who kept him after school, he arrives at a point in his age falsification at which he can no longer locate the experience in a schoolroom; now it has to be a nursemaid (or, in former times, the hired girl) who delightfully did him in. Whatever the circumstances of the story itself you can depend upon the narrator to relate it with great conviction, just as you can depend upon the listener to reject it as a lie of the most flagrant character.

Let us not mistake the basic element of the lie; let us not pretend that the opportunity never existed—it probably did. But the little boy of seven or nine or twelve did not respond as in after years he says he responded.

\* \* \*

By the time he was sixteen Clifford had, through no conscious fault of his own, attained to a certain rugged physical beauty which made him attractive to girls. He stirred instincts in them that were not precisely maternal. And among the Candlewick girls who cast speculative glances in his direction was Miss Breda Gassoway, a young woman of considerable physical charm herself, thoroughly unattainable by virtue of her social position and about three years older than Clifford.

One soft summer evening the boy was daydreaming his way homeward, his mind occupied with buttes and jingle-bobs and guitar music, when an automobile drew in at the kerb and a voice called his name. He stepped quickly to the side of the car and, recognising Miss Gassoway, removed his hat and stood at attention.

"Hello, Clifford," she said.

"Oh," he said, "hello." It was the first time, as far as he could remember, that she had ever actually spoken to him.

"I'm in a terrible fix, Clifford. I hate to bother you, but—"

"Is somebody follering you?"

"Oh no. It's not anything like that. It's just that I'm frightened. My folks have gone out of town for a few days and I'm up at the house all alone and I think there has been somebody prowling around the place. It's all right when I get in the house and the doors all locked, but when I have to put the car away—it's so awful dark in the garage and I get so darn nervous. If you could do me the favour—if you'd have the time to ride up with me and help me put the car away . . ."

It seemed impossible that this thing was happening to him—Miss Breda Gassoway calling on *him* in her moment of distress. "Be proud to do it," he said, trying to make his voice sound casual. He got into the seat beside her and was immediately thrown into a

state of confusion by Miss Gassoway's knee. She seemed unaware of the fact that her skirt had been pulled back and that her soft-looking and luscious knee was staring Clifford straight in the face. The moment he saw it he cut his eyes away from it quickly and stared out through the windshield. The excitement and all, he thought, the poor girl's fright—he had a feeling that he was not living up to this role of cavalier that had suddenly been thrust upon him. Vaguely he had an idea that he should reach down with his hand and pull the skirt gently over the knee. What was he thinking! Pulling down Miss Breda Gassoway's skirt! His tongue seemed to be withering in his mouth.

They turned in at the Gassoway driveway and, sure enough, it was quite dark. Miss Breda shot the car into the garage expertly, and they got out and Clifford closed the garage door.

"My goodness, Clifford," she said to him, "but it was real nice of you. I always *did* say that you were one of the nicest boys in this town."

"It wasn't anything. I was proud to——"

"Now," she went on, "now that you've been so nice—I know it's not really proper and all that, but as I said, my folks are away, and if you'd care to come in for a few minutes——"

"Oh no. Thank you very much. Wasn't doing a thing but on my way home."

"Now, Clifford," she coaxed, "come on in. The least I could do to show my appreciation—well, I could maybe fix up a few sandwiches."

He had never been in the big Gassoway house and suddenly the urge was on him to see it. He had heard so much about it, heard they even had a billiard table in it. He'd like to see that. "Well," he said hesitantly, "I'm not really very hungry, but—all right, just for a few minutes."

In the big living room Miss Gassoway walked straight to an enormous divan and flopped on to it in a semi-reclining position. Clifford sat down in a chair opposite her, gazing uncomfortably at the splendours all about him.

"Why don't you come over here?" Miss Gassoway said, patting a spot beside her.

"Thank you," said Clifford, wondering where the billiard table was, "but I'm very comfortable."

"Oh, Clifford," she pouted, "is that any way to act? There's nobody home. Not a soul here but just us two. My goodness, don't you think we ought to get a little better acquainted? After all—— Here, come over here right this minute!"

A sickly grin came on his face and he was amazed to find himself getting to his feet and walking uncertainly across the room and sitting down on the divan. He sat on the edge of the cushion, in a manner suggesting he was ready to spring away. Miss Gassoway fluttered her eyelids and then gazed at him in a manner meant to suggest that carnality was in order, but which he interpreted as an indication that she might be coming down with the measles. She was lying back with one shoulder on the arm of the divan and now she wriggled her body slightly and he thought: "She sure has been upset by something——"

"About these prowlers——" he began.

She interrupted him "Don't you think it's *warm* in here, Clifford?" She accompanied the words by a tugging at the front of her dress.

"I'm quite comfortable," he said, fixing his gaze on a painting of some sheep on the opposite wall. There was a long pause and then Miss Gassoway sighed and stretched her arms back over her head and flexed her body upward, and suddenly she threw her left leg up and on to the back of the divan. Her right foot remained on the floor. Clifford swallowed heavily.

"This is a real nice place you got here," he said.

Miss Gassoway's left leg came down. She sat up straight on the divan, both feet firmly on the floor. She bit her lip. The sudden change in position startled Clifford.

"Did you hear something?" he asked. "Something outside?"

"No!" she snapped at him and he could tell from the tone of her response that she was emotionally upset about something. He marvelled at the mysteriousness of girls—the way they got so frightened

about the dark and prowlers and being alone, and how this fear caused them to behave in such an eccentric manner. And just to prove the point of his musing, Miss Gassoway suddenly flung herself on him, and moose calls began issuing from her throat.

"Miss Gassoway!" he cried, struggling slightly. "Miss Gassoway! Please! You're sick!"

She had him down on the divan, her arms wrapped around him, and now she kissed him on the lips; he was trying to talk, but all that came out was a gurgling noise. The moment she lifted her lips he quickly turned his head, and now she pounced again, and this time bit him on the ear. "Miss Gassoway!" he howled.

"Hold still!" she commanded, and he held still for a few moments, his mind in complete panic. This was a situation far beyond his experience—a girl gone out of her mind. She was having a seizure, known locally as a fit, her face was down now in the curve of his neck and her hot breath was beating against his flesh. He closed his eyes and said to himself, "Courage!" He must try to calm her down and after that, really, she ought to have a doctor. Suddenly she giggled and then whispered in his ear. "Did you ever wonder about snakes?"

He tried to consider what she had said. His mind wasn't functioning too well, but he assumed that she was thinking about how fast a snake can get over the ground without any legs at all. He bet she had a fever—a whopping fever. A person as sick as she was shouldn't be left all alone in a big house like this. Might die in the night. She had lessened her grip on him a trifle and now, abruptly, he freed himself and got up, almost spilling her on to the floor. She lay sprawled on the divan, looking up at him, a strange brightness in her eyes.

"Miss Gassoway," he said, "I got to go now. I think you better call Doc Waite if you get to feeling sick again. Maybe better call him anyway." And be sure all the doors are locked. Thank you for inviting me in. It's been a real pleasure and I—well, I hope you regain your health."

She didn't say a word to him as he picked up his hat and went out the door. Walking home through the dark streets, he thought

about the violence of the disturbance that had seized her. Too darn bad it had to happen on this, of all nights "Doggone it," he said aloud, "I didn't get to see that billiard table!"



## PARADES

In common with all other communities, large or small, Sauk Centre is a town of parade lovers. Considering the amount of time the American people spend looking at parades and marching in parades, it seems strange that nobody has written a book on the history and theory and technique of parading. We have books on how to flush carburetors and partridges, books on flag etiquette and soufflé cooking, books on onychomancy, astrology, dactylomancy, sideromancy, divination by Hallowe'en nuts, genethialogy, palmistry, pessomancy, chiromancy, rhabdomancy, the use of the divining rod to locate water, extispicy, pythoism, aleuromancy, and all the other major pursuits of the intelligent human—and no recognition of parading. The fact that one of the bright and shining flowers of our civilization is the baton twirler has been overlooked by literature. Throughout this land of ours thousands of lovely young females live from day to day with a consuming flame burning in their breasts—the desire to twirl a baton expertly while walking like the front end of a high school horse.



## LAST WORDS

The Literature of Last Words is an impressive one. From reading it one would judge that human beings have a strong tendency to depart this world in a burst of oratorical glory. Byron's dying words were, "Forward! Forward! Courage! Follow my example—don't be afraid!" Napoleon's final utterance was, "Head of the army! France! France!" Nero cried, "What an artist is now about to perish!" The Duke of Buckingham (who gave his name to all those streets off the Strand) exclaimed, "O! what a prodigal have I been of that most

valuable of all possessions—Time!” And so on and so on. When David Garrick lay on his deathbed one might expect, from one of the world’s most famous actors, a declaration of high dramatic content as an exit line. To my mind it was all of that, and the most single interesting fact about the man. His final words were “Oh, dear.” Played with great restraint.



## CHEESE SCOOP

A shocking discovery today. Nelle has been secretly buying. She is squirreling the stuff away, deep in one of the closets, and I stumbled on her cache this morning. She appears to be cornering the silver market. When I began to raise a storm about it, she quickly tried to divert me by describing the assortment of cutlery as dating from the reigns of George the First and George the Second, and one batch of eating implements as being White Russian. It must be that I am growing tolerant—perhaps my contacts with the gentry of England are having the desired effect and I am becoming mannerly—for I didn’t bust her one. I reduced the contention to a single item—a silver cheese scoop. What in the name of heaven do we want with a cheese scoop? She said to scoop cheese. “What cheese?” I insisted. “We don’t eat as much cheese as an ordinary house rat and, anyway, the kind of cheese we do occasionally eat doesn’t need to be scooped.” Her reply was “I plan on eating more cheese now that we’ve got this beautiful cheese scoop.” It appears that, in order to use the cheese scoop to any effect, it is necessary to buy one of those cheeses shaped like a pumpkin, the top is sliced off the same way the top of a pumpkin is sliced off at Hallowe’en and then the cheese is scooped out in hunks with the cheese scoop. There’s something crazy with this kind of an operation. It’s as if a housewife found a bit of loose steam knocking about in her kitchen, and rushed right out and bought a steam shovel.



## MOTIVE FOR CLIMBING

After a while Dick came in. I had noticed he had a number of books on the subject of mountain climbing, and he said he had developed an academic interest in it because the English almost have a monopoly on climbing mountains—that is, climbing them to no purpose. There are thousands of climbers scattered over these islands and they have clubs, and all the clubs are under a central body called the Mountaineering Council. These people are, at the present moment, in a passion about the Matterhorn. It appears that news came out of Switzerland recently that a funicular railway is to be built to the top of the Matterhorn. The British Mountaineering Council went into action and appealed to Parliament. The mountain climbers contend that an easy way to get to the top of the Matterhorn would be disgraceful, possibly criminal, and they appeal to the British government to make strong representations to the Swiss government to keep that beautiful mountain hard to get up. I told Dick that this situation seems to establish one fact: the motive of a mountain climber is not to get to the top. I said that if matters reached a crisis the argument could be settled easily enough. Let the funicular be built up one side of the Matterhorn and the other side could be reserved for British climbers. He just grinned at me and said that I didn't understand about mountain climbing.



## FLAMING YOUTH

I stopped once at a soda fountain where the college kids gather and sat watching some of them. I had my eye on two boys and two girls who were at a nearby table. They were having a fine time, and I watched them admiringly and with more than a hint of envy, thinking of that crack that forty is the old age of youth. Then I saw another boy come in and glance around the room and settle on that group. There was a mad sort of light in his eyes and an eagerness as



## **THE / HUMAN / ANIMAL**

he started walking quickly toward the table, and I knew instinctively what was in his mind. He was in love with one of these girls, and here she was, out with another boy. Maybe there would be a quarrel, a scene, hot words exchanged, and a fraternity pin flung in someone's face. I know how it is with college kids. This boy came swiftly then to the table and swung another chair up to it, and his face was alive with the emotional ferment that was within him, and then I heard him exclaim:

"My God, have you seen what the Manchester Guardian has to say about the Marshall Plan?"



## **CASTE SYSTEM**

We made an earnest effort to get the caste system of the Southwest untangled in our minds. We are Anglos—meaning native\* white Americans and meaning also that D. H. Lawrence was not an Anglo. I've forgotten what he was. Then there are the Spanish. They rank above the Mexicans, although they had their origin in Mexico. The Spanish are actually Mexicans with money or with relatives who have money. Don't call a Spanish person a Mexican if you value your life. Then come the Indians, and there are several classifications for them, the distinctions being recognizable by such considerations as whether or not an Indian wears a blanket. After all this is explained and you are trying to sort it out and arrange it properly the person doing the explaining will say, "Oh yes. The coyotes." The coyotes are the offspring of an Anglo and a Spanish person. Quite likely there is yet another classification—the offspring of an Anglo and a Mexican. It never did become clear where a coyote ranks in the social scale. But one thing did become crystal clear: The South has no racial problem to speak of.

The human family in this sandy land is not one great big lovely brotherhood. There are, for example, these Penitente birds who flog themselves half to death. The Indians think the Penitentes are crazy. The Penitentes think that the non-floggers of their faith are crazy. The non-floggers think the artists are crazy. The artists think

the community boosters are daft. The boosters think the poets are mad. The poets are convinced that the prose writers are unhinged. The prose writers believe the tourists ought to be slaughtered. And everybody sits around and eats beans.



## HITCHHIKER

Before we started our little expedition everyone made special mention of the hitchhiker hazard, and we ignored the waving thumbs all along the way until New Mexico. Just outside Raton we saw a boy beside the highway up ahead, a crude bundle of clothing at his feet and a sad and sorrowful and forlorn air about him. We passed him and then for some reason thought better of it, and I remarked that I had a hunch that if we picked him up there would be a story in him. He looked harmless enough (the authorities say the harmless looking ones are usually the most dangerous).

"We'll put him in the front seat with us," I said, "where I can keep an eye on him, and you talk to him, ask him questions."

The boy picked up his bundle and ambled up to the car and got into the front seat. He rode with us all the way to Santa Fe. He was seventeen and had on battered cowboy boots and levis, and his face was covered with pimples (a condition known to a small town banker of my acquaintance as "acme").

I have encountered some dumb kids in my time, but none that could hold a candle to this one. He was the dumbest human being ever permitted to wander at large in the entire United States. Long before we got to Santa Fe I had grown so disgusted with him that I was toying with the idea of killing him. His home was in a small town over in Arizona, but he had run away from it and joined a small circus and all during the summer just ending had been traveling with the show through the New England states. Here was a situation with a classical touch—the teen age kid who had run away from home to join the circus. We tried every approach known to the reportorial trade and even gave him the silent treatment for a while in the hope that he would open up.

## THE HUMAN ANIMAL

"Did you have any freaks in the show?" my wife asked him.

"Huh?"

"Freaks—you know, circus freaks."

"Yeh "

"What kind did you have?"

Long pause Apparently he had to think hard for three or four minutes before he could answer a simple question Then at last

"We hadda woman hadda face like a horse "

"Her face actually looked like a horse's face?"

"Zackly like "

"Was she a fake?"

"Huh?"

"Was she a fake? Did she have on some kind of special make up?"

"Do' know Looked awful real I paid my way in to see 'er She sure look like a horse "

"Didn't you ever see her other times?"

"Stayed in 'er tent all time "

We tried other angles of approach Mostly he just grunted But my wife kept after him and somehow got onto the subject of wild animals

He said, "Used to be these guys went in a cage and fought lines an' taggers " Long pause "I wooden do it "

He would if I had been there for I'd have seized him and thrown him in amongst those lines and taggers



## RUGGED INDIVIDUALIST

John Beggs was a man who made about forty million dollars by inventing the strap which straphangers cling to in subways and trolley cars He was in the traction business and loved money, and he invenred the strap because he figured it would help to crowd more people into his public conveyances, and he was right I think perhaps that he was the champion penny pincher of all time Even when he had all those millions he wouldn't eat a bite of lunch unless someone else paid for it, if nobody invited him out to lunch, he

went hungry. He wore the same derby hat for twelve years. One day he went to the bank which helped him with his business affairs, and a vice-president of the bank accidentally sat down on the old derby hat and mashed it. John Beggs stomped out of the place and never again did a lick of business with that bank. In his home he refused to hire domestic help, but had stenographers who were employed by his several corporations come to his home after office hours and do all the chores. He compelled his office boy to shine his shoes daily, for free. The boy had some spunk and one day gave the old flatus an argument. He said he didn't mind contributing the labor involved in shining shoes but that the materials—the rags and brushes and polish—had to be paid for out of his own pocket and he felt that he ought to be reimbursed for it. Old Man Beggs had a quick answer for that. "Young man," he said, "I got mine by digging. I started digging when I was your age and I'm still digging. Right now I'm digging you for shines. You go and find someone to dig. That's the way it goes."

You see, the man had character, and a fine, admirable sort of American philosophy; he was a rugged individualist, epitomizing free enterprise and free shoeshines, and if I had been that office boy I'd have taken my heaviest brush and raised knots on his noggin.



## POST CARDS AND CAMERAS

In the ship's salon I watched a couple known to a few of us as Mr. and Mrs. Wish-You-Were-Here.

This man and his wife turned up in the salon soon after the *Noronic* sailed from Detroit. They had two stacks of picture post cards, and each stack was at least a foot high. They placed these stacks on a table between them, got out their fountain pens, and went to work. They wrote and stamped cards until well past midnight that evening. The next morning they had an early breakfast and returned to the job. They rarely spoke to each other. Sometimes one or the other would sit with fountain pen pressed against cheek, gazing off into space, trying to remember an address, perhaps, or

trying to think of someone they had missed, or trying to invent something fresh and witty to write on the cards. All the time they were on the ship they wrote post cards. When the *Noronic* docked they scurried ashore to mail those they had written and to lay in new supplies of cards and stamps. I don't think they ever noticed the scenery outside or the other passengers inside. They never took part in the Keno games or the dancing or the Mile Walk or the horse races or the Sing Song. The high point of the entire voyage was the period during which we were passing through the Soo locks. Everyone was on deck to watch this operation—everyone but Mr. and Mrs. Wish You Were Here. They didn't even raise their eyes from their post cards.

There was one man who practiced photography with all the singleness of purpose which Mr. and Mrs. Wish You Were Here applied to their post cards. He was a camera nut of the first hypo. He was a short, slightly built, nervous man traveling with his wife, who weighed about one hundred eighty and his equipment, which weighed about three hundred eighty. He must have had a dozen different cameras, plus flash guns, exposure meters, tripods, and all that.

Late one morning I was sitting on a divan reading a history book. Opposite me sat a dour looking citizen engrossed in a newspaper. We were at either side of a doorway which led to the deck. Suddenly the camera nut appeared on the scene. He was in full harness, with a couple of thousand dollars' worth of equipment strapped to his person. He appeared to be heading for a companionway which led to the bar when he happened to glance in our direction and beyond us through the open doorway. We heard him gasp and saw him reverse his field. He came up to the door, unfastened an exposure meter or Geiger counter or something from his belt, and sighted through it, looking out to sea. Then he brought one of his cameras into action and took half a dozen quick shots, aiming at the horizon. I witnessed all this across the top of my book, and the other man watched it over the top of his newspaper. When the camera nut had taken his six shots he whirled around and departed in a hurry. Then without a word between us the newspaper reader

and I stood up, walked to the doorway, and stared out across the water. There were no ships in sight, no birds, no sea serpents, no barnacles, no land, no clouds—nothing but Lake Huron as far as we could see. The two of us stood there shoulder to shoulder staring for a few moments, and then the newspaper reader turned to me and said, "By God, it's hard to believe, but he took a picture of nothin'!"



## ORGANIZED FUN

There were something over three hundred passengers on the Great Lakes steamer, and they were, generally speaking, just as charming as any congregation of tourists you might find on a boat bound for Europe. They had organized fun. They ate excellent food and drank at the bar or in their cabins. They played games and danced and had moments musicale. They appeared on deck in clothes they wouldn't dream of wearing on the street and struck up "lasting friendships" with one another. They frightened sea gulls with the incessant clicking of their camera shutters and exhausted the ship's supply of postal cards in the first three hours. They courted the attention of the ship's captain as if he were God, and the ladies flirted outrageously with the first officer, a grimly handsome man of the Gary Cooper stamp who could have had any woman he wanted, but who apparently disliked females.

There was a bouncy guy on board known as the cruise director. His job was to keep the passengers entertained, to organize the fun. His breed exists of necessity all over the world. In the summer resorts of the Catskills, for example, he is known as the social director or sometimes the sociable director. Left to itself and lacking professional direction, the human animal is unable to invent methods of passing the time. This condition is not confined to any one class; in fact it appears to be more common among the crumbs of the upper crust. Members of the so-called international set, deprived of the services of that great political scientist Elsa Maxwell, would likely spend their days cutting out paper dolls. Miss Maxwell directs their

## THE HUMAN ANIMAL

play and teaches them to enjoy themselves at, possibly, cutting out paper dolls.



## HOW TO CRASH SOCIETY

In 1870 at Mobile Alabama there lived a plump and proper young lady named Alva Smith, daughter of a well to do cotton planter Alva was sent to France for her education and soon after her return, in 1874, when she was twenty one, she married William Kissam Vanderbilt of New York, grandson of the old Commodore and heir to half of an estate estimated at \$200,000,000 Thus she became the Smith family's greatest contribution to American society, to be known in time as "the indefatigable duchess of the Gilded Age"

Following her marriage Alva said 'I was the first girl of my set to marry a Vanderbilt' What she meant was that she had dropped below her social station in choosing a husband In that era of elegance the Vanderbilts were regarded as a vulgar, parvenu tribe, and when Alva established herself in New York she found she was not quite acceptable because Mrs William Astor wanted no part of her. The Astor clan, wealthy beyond belief, ruled the social roost Their money came from old John Jacob Astor, who took his profits from the fur trade, invested in mortgages on New York business property, foreclosed on them, and became the Landlord of New York And Mrs William Astor was the Queen

Alva Smith Vanderbilt was a spunky lass Nuts, quoth she, to Mrs. Astor And she drew her battle lines determined that she would conquer New York society, and not only conquer it, but rule it She hired a famous architect, Richard M Hunt, and had him design and build a three million dollar house at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-second Street, and she filled this house with Renaissance furniture, priceless tapestries, medieval armor, and all that sort of thing. She didn't know it, but Architect Hunt was a man with sly whims, and the mansion he built for her was a replica of the house of Jacques Coeur, the greatest social upstart of the Middle Ages.

When she got her house all finished, Alva sat down and contrived a Vanderbilt coat of arms, featuring a cluster of acorns. Someone asked her why she chose this particular nut and she replied: "Because, my dear, great oaks from little acorns grow"

Now the Smith girl was ready to open the battle. She announced that on March 26, 1883, she would have a housewarming—the most magnificent fancy dress ball in the history of America. She was shooting the works with a party that would cost upward of a quarter million dollars.

Everybody in town started talking about it, and Miss Caroline Astor, daughter of the Queen, assuming that she would be invited, began making her plans. She and several of her friends would attend as the "Star Quadrille," performing a little pageant in which each girl would wear one of those new fangled electric lights on her forehead, denoting vacuity.

Of course Alva Smith Vanderbilt heard of Miss Caroline's eager planning and she let it ride for a while, then dropped the word that, regrettable as it might seem, she would be unable to invite Miss Caroline because no Astor had ever called on her. Now there was hell to pay in the baronial halls of the Astor tribe. Scenes of anguish and hysteria, shouting and pouting, and perhaps even the shattering of an occasional vozz. At last Mrs. William Astor grat her teeth, clumb into her surrey, rode to the Vanderbilt house, left her card in the foyer, and drove home, a beaten biscuit if there ever was one. That was enough—the mere dropping of a calling card on a table signified abject surrender—and Alva was in! The Smith girl from Alabama had beaten the enemy to its knees, and the party itself was a thing to talk about for years to come. Alva appeared as a Venetian princess surrounded by housebroken white doves. And even General Ulysses S. Grant attended and, as usual, got tiddled and burnt himself putting the wrong end of his cigar into his mouth.



## FAMILY

Shortly before he died in New Orleans, Roark Bradford and I had a long evening of talk, and one of the stories Brad told con-



## THE HUMAN ANIMAL

cerned a train ride he had taken through northern Mississippi. He was about to get to sleep in a berth when a violent quarrel erupted in the aisle of the car. Brad poked his head through the curtains and saw two angry men facing each other in the aisle. At that instant one of them roared "Nobody can say that to an Abernathy and get away with it!" Whereupon he clouted his opponent to the floor. The fallen one got to his feet and shouted "No Abernathy can hit a Tolliver and live to tell the tale!" Whereupon he, Tolliver, belted Abernathy to the carpet. Abernathy got up screaming that no Abernathy had ever tasted dust before, most particularly at the instigation of a Tolliver, and went at Tolliver again. The battle raged on, and from his Pullman berth Brad noticed that the train conductor was standing in the vestibule watching the proceedings with an air of resignation and boredom.

After Abernathy and Tolliver had slugged each other half senseless they dragged themselves away and the conductor came down the aisle. Brad stopped him. "How come," he said, "you didn't stop those two men?"

"Listen," said the conductor, "my name happens to be Dabney. I wouldn't give a damn if trash like that kilt each other."



## INFLUENCE

There are several individuals in my circle of acquaintances who have a passion for buying everything wholesale. It seems to be a sort of disease. One man I know, a Broadway character, hasn't been in a retail store for years—doesn't believe in them. He loves to pull strings, use Influence. He wouldn't dream of going to Grand Central and walking up to a ticket window and buying a Pullman reservation. Instead, he will spend an hour or two phoning around until he gets a line on a railroad official who is a friend of a cousin of a friend of his, and then he'll spend two or three additional hours getting through to the railroad official, and in the end his Pullman reservation will be laid aside for him. Only then does he go over to Grand Central to pick it up, at the same window where he would

have gone had he bought it in a routine manner—and he gets the same Pullman space and pays the same sum for it. But the way in which he works it, he feels good, because he has used Influence.



## A GOOD DEED

I asked if anybody at the Quaker meetinghouse said anything at all. Well, yes. A woman got up and spoke a few words.

"She told a little story, and it was real nice," said my mother-in-law. "It was a little story that showed how good people are. She said she was sitting in her house in Chappaqua, looking out the window, and there is a street that goes up a steep hill, and it was raining. Along came a woman with a big sack of groceries in her arms. This woman—the one with the groceries, happened to look out into the street and saw that the gutter was clogged up. Some trash had built up a little dam and the water was backing up there. So this woman put down her groceries and walked over and took her hand and brushed the trash away so the water could run on down the hill. She didn't know that anybody was watching her—she was just a good woman."

I sat down and meditated on that story. I have the unhappy faculty of believing that human beings rarely commit a deed that is wholly free of selfishness. So whenever I hear of such a deed being done, it impresses me tremendously. After thinking about this particular woman for a while, I concluded that her motives were open to question—that her little act of pushing that trash aside might not have been altogether noble. I admit that she may have been performing a good deed, but there are several other possible explanations for her act. For example:

(1) She was the wife of the man who has charge of the water department and she saw in that little pileup of water a possible threat to her comfort and peace of mind—a small flood which might get her husband out of bed in the middle of the night. So she fixed it.

(2) Her home was near by and she was troubled with a wet

## THE HUMAN ANIMAL

cellar and she foresaw the possibility of a little flood, which would send water pouring into her basement So she fixed it

(3) She was sore at the proprietor of a grocery store at the foot of the hill and, seeing that water, she thought that maybe if she released it and let it rush on down the hill it would somehow get into his basement and ruin all his shredded wheat So she fixed it

(4) She has bad dreams, always involving dams, and a sort of phobia has developed, so that any time she sees dammed up water, it gives her the willies So she fixed it

(5) She has a little dog which she loves The dog in turn loves rain water She is afraid that he will find this pool of water after it has grown stagnant and drink some of it, and get sick as a dog So she fixed it

(6) She thought she saw a half dollar in that little pile of trash, and went over and poked around, but it was only a cap from a milk bottle That made her angry, and she took a good swipe at it, and accidentally fixed it

That'll be all for today children Sunday school's dismissed



## ASKING PRICE

Private enterprise is a good thing and I'm for it, but I sometimes suspect that it has some peculiar ethics connected with it The bargaining of businessmen I have been told, is not a form of dishonesty—it's a game It's like chess, or poker or ping pong If you can slip a quick one past an opponent throw him off balance, deceive him as to your next move, and take a thousand bucks from him in the process, that's all part of the game, and the loser knows it and will respect the winner for it and even take him out and buy him a drink

Let us have a brief look at the commonplace phrase, "asking price," as it is employed in the real estate business It is not the price that the owner expects to get for his property I have been told that at no time in the history of the world has anybody ever paid the asking price for a piece of property That, of course, is not true—but

it is a rare bird who does pay it. A man who has a house to sell figures out what he wants to get for it—say twenty thousand dollars. So he puts an “asking price” of twenty-five thousand on it. Along comes a prospective buyer and looks the property over and finally he says to the owner, “Well, how much?” The owner then says, “I’m asking twenty five thousand.” And the prospect says, “Yeh. I know But how much you want for it?” Whereupon the owner says, “Twenty thousand ”

What the hell kind of a fumadiddlin’ way of doing business is that? I suppose the whole theory of the “asking price” is based on the idea that every now and then a colossal sucker comes along, one who doesn’t understand the science of “asking prices” and who will pay the first figure quoted him without haggling. If he does, then the way I see it he is being swindled out of—to use the cited example—a clean five thousand dollars He is paying five thousand bucks more than the property is worth

Businessmen who read this will probably laugh at me, and consider me naive, but I say there’s more than a hint of dishonesty in them, and their methods get me so wrought up at times that I start hollering my head off in company, so that people who know me sometimes say, “Omigod, the evening’s ruined!”



## NAME-DROPPING

Name-dropping is not strictly a city pursuit It is, if anything, more virulent in the country than it is in Manhattan I recall a young girl friend of Nancy’s who went through an elaborate conversational caper in order to bring up the name of Van Johnson. Once that name was mentioned, she didn’t make the mistake of connecting herself up with Van Johnson immediately. She let the talk run along for a minute or two, and then she said:

“Speaking of Van Johnson ’Member the time he had that automobile accident, nearly killed himself? Well, I happen to be a close friend of the girl that was in the car with him when he had that accident.”

## **'THE HUMAN ANIMAL**

**"You are!" I said.**

I think she then suddenly remembered that I have spent some time around Hollywood, she probably realized that caution was in order because, after all, I might be acquainted with the girl who was in Van Johnson's automobile with him the time he had the accident

"Well," she said, "maybe not a close friend. But I went to a party once and she was there—the same girl that was in the automobile with Van Johnson when he had the accident."

That sort of thing is long haul name dropping, but it's common. The best example I've heard in recent years involved a case of horse-dropping. One day a mousy little man with a ragged mustache came up the hill, accompanied by a fat wife. They got out of their car and introduced themselves in an embarrassed manner and apologized profusely for their boldness in calling, but would I mind autographing a book for them? They had the book with them, so I took them into my office and had them sit down while I went to work with the pen. They were nervous, and sat forward on their chairs, and then the plump wife decided to drop a name. It happens that I am acquainted with a few people who have big names—for example, Benjamin Harrison Serkowich—and that I am a large-scale dropper of names. This woman, sitting in my office, apparently decided that in the presence of such a high-quality name-dropper as myself she would let fall the only name she and her husband are able to drop. Without build-up, with nothing by way of preliminary, she suddenly said:

**"You know the horse Assault?"**

The question shook me up a little, for I didn't know the horse Assault, that is, not personally.

**"Yes," I finally said. "I know him."**

"Well," she said, "I thought maybe you would be interested in an experience Phil here and I had. You know Jockey Mehrtens that rides the horse Assault?"

**"Yes. I know of him."**

"Well," she said, settling back a few inches in the chair, "what do we do but pick up the paper one day and there it says that Jockey

Mehrtens is getting married, and the girl he is getting married to has got the same name as a second cousin of Phil's here that we have lost track of for several years."

At this point her husband spoke up.

"Jockey Mehrtens," he said. "The one that rides the horse Assault."

"We got to wondering about it," went on his wife, "and the more we thought the more we figured out it just had to be Phil's second cousin, being the same name and all. So then we read it in another newspaper, that they were getting married on a Saturday, I think, and it gave the address where Jockey Mehrtens lives, and it had her name in it again, and so when it came along Saturday evening Phil suddenly says, 'By George, I think I'll just get on the phone and call up down there and see if it's her. After all, she's my second cousin—nothing wrong with a man calling up his second cousin when she goes and gets herself a jockey.'"

"The way I said it," spoke up Phil, "was a sort of joke. She got herself a jockey."

"Phil! So we put in a call Long Distance to Jockey Mehrtens at this address on Long Island, it was about ten o'clock Saturday night, and it took quite a while, but finally somebody answered, a man, and Phil asked him if he was Mr. Mehrtens"

"I done all the talkin'." Phil spoke up. After all, it was his second cousin; and he had the receiver to his ear, so why let his wife tell this wonderful story? He took over. "This guy says no, and who's callin', and I say Long Distance and I wanna talk to Jockey Mehrtens, so after a while there he is, on the phone, and I tell him my name, and ask him did the marriage go through all right, and he says it sure did, and then I mention this girl's name and say I am innarested to know if she happens to be my second cousin that once lived in Newark, and he says no, it is a different one."

"What a party!" interrupted Phil's wife. "Tell about the party."

"I'm comin' to it!" said Phil irritably. "So it turned out it wasn't my cousin, but I decided long as I was on the phone I might as well extend my congratulations to the bridegroom, so I did, and Jockey Mehrtens thanks me, and says he has married a wonderful

## THE HUMAN ANIMAL

girl even though she is not the one I thought she was. But—get this! What a party! I could hear it in the background. Were they havin' a party at that house! Man alive! I could hear all this laughin' and yellin' and carryin' on "

"I imagine," said his wife, "that all the others were jockeys too."

That was about the extent of it. I thought it was impressive, and expertly worked out. These people realized that they had a name to drop, the name of Jockey Mehrtens, but they figured that the horse Assault was superior to Jockey Mehrtens as a droppable name, so they dropped Assault right at the beginning, and that gave tone and stature to the whole episode



## VICARIOUS VERTIGO

People who are stage daffy strike me as being of the same caliber as autograph bugs. If they ever go to a movie I have an idea they sit for ninety minutes, saying to themselves "That's not really Joan Crawford up there. That's not anybody at all. Nobody. Only a bunch of photographs. No more Joan Crawford than I am. Joan Crawford's out in Hollywood." If they were seeing Joan Crawford on the stage, they'd apparently get a tingle from the fact of their being within a few yards of Joan Crawford in the flesh. I think such people suffer from the disease called Vicarious Vertigo.

Vicarious Vertigo is a malady endemic in the United States of America and is characterized by pleasurable dizzy spells, swollen tongue, and, in some cases, loin twitch. Something also happens to the head. Both children and grownups suffer from Vicarious Vertigo, which is contagious, and the pill hasn't yet been pestled that will cure it.

Perhaps the most common manifestation of the disease is to be observed outside stage doors. Here the Vicarious Vertigo germ is joined by bacillus autograph, causing the victim to see spots before the eyes as big as basketballs.

If you are an observing person, you may see evidence of the disease all around you. Not long ago I was riding in a subway train when

the chance arose to study an interesting case. The victim was a girl in her middle teens. The train was crowded and the girl was standing. Across the car was a middle-aged woman, occupying a vacant look. As it developed, the middle-aged woman was the dam of the teen-age girl. I was busy reading the works of Keats (Fred) when the girl, in that loud and unself-conscious manner of New Yorkers, yelled:

"Mommer!"

Mommer looked up.

"Mommer," yelled the girl, "you rememba that putchy kid lives uppen th' next block over tords Margie's name Freddie got the freckles all over him?"

"Yehr," said Mommer "So what about?"

"Jus' think," yelled the girl. "You rememba that they had this memorial surface to Lou Gehrig up the Polo Grounds or somewhere and LaGardy and all them was there?"

"Where at?" Mommer called out.

"Well," said the girl, ignoring the question, "this Freddie he was the one played the taps on the bugle. Right there at the memorial surface to Lou Gehrig. Frunta all them people and LaGardy. Freddie, that lives over tords . . . You know, Freddie, got all them freckles on him."

"No!" said Mommer

"Swearta God!" said the girl "Margie told me he was the one."

The girl looked around at the other people in the car, smiling proudly

There is a case of Vicarious Vertigo. Knowing the course usually taken by the malady, I realized that this girl would go around for weeks and months and maybe years, bragging about how she was "personly acquainnit with Freddie that played the bugle at the Lou Gehrig memorial surface in front of LaGardy." She was enjoying a sort of three cushion celebrity herself and, no doubt, the disease soon took hold of Mommer. Mommer could now brag about how her own daughter knew Freddie that played . . . etc.





## TWO RATIONAL ANIMALS

A shy, retiring fellow, press agent by trade, crept into the *World-Telegram* office one afternoon and in a thin voice which drowned out the noises of traffic in West Street and the Hudson River announced that he had become public-relations counselor to a pair of intellectual chorus girls.

"These girls," he said, "are rational animals—very smart. They read books like *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Rebecca*, and now what do you suppose has happened to them! They are wearing corsets, and their boss, Georgie Hale, has told them that he is going to fire them if they don't quit wearing corsets, because Georgie Hale doesn't think corsets give a girl the old oomph."

Naturally, I couldn't wait to get to these rational animals. A rendezvous was arranged, and I bearded them in their den at the Hotel Edison. They turned out to be Miss Marion Murray, late of Louisville, Ky., and Miss Bernice Niles, who comes from Portland, Me. They were at the moment dancers in one of Broadway's biggest cabarets.

With no preliminary talk of the weather, Marion and Bernice began a defense of the corset, denouncing their employer for having taken a stand against it.

"Imagine it," said Miss Murray. "He even presumes to say we can't wear girdles. Almost all the time I wear a panty girdle and I'll wear corsets, too, if I feel like it."

"What," I asked, "is a panty girdle?"

"A panty girdle," said Miss Murray, "is the same as a girdle, only different in a way, if you know what I mean. It's not——"

"Haven't you got one, dear, to show him?" put in Miss Niles.

Miss Murray went to a wardrobe trunk, rummaged about in it and came up with a panty girdle. Divorced from the female frame, a panty girdle is a sorry-looking piece of textile, resembling one of those things a basketball player wears around his knees. Miss Murray began stretching it this way and that.

"You see," she said, "a panty girdle is different from a girdle because it has legs in it. That's why it's called a panty girdle. See, like panties. And it has the two way stretch." She wrestled the thing around a bit to demonstrate this latter point.

I was glancing about the room, looking for evidences of culture, when Miss Niles spoke up.

"There's a girl at the club," she said, "one of the dancers, and one night she had a big, mad date. We stole her panty girdle on her. It was a scream."

"A big, mad date?" I asked. "What is that?"

"Oh," exclaimed Miss Murray, "where have you been all your life? A big, mad date is an important date with the top boy friend."

"Does it mean," I ventured, "that they have been mad at each other and are having a date to make it up?"

"Not at all," said Miss Niles. "It means that it's a very important date. It is almost a red hot date."

"I take it that a red-hot date is more important than a big, mad date?"

"Yes," said Miss Murray. "There is the big, mad date. Then there's the red-hot date. Better than these is the big, mad, red hot. And then the best of all is the big, mad, red hot, out of this-world date. I've never had a big, mad, red hot, out of this world."

Somehow I felt sorry for her because life had cheated her thus far of this wonderful experience, though the deprivation no doubt saved her money in doctor bills.

"You show girls speak an interesting language," I said. "What are some of the other expressions you use among yourselves?"

"Well," said Miss Murray, "let me see now. When a girl makes some nasty crack about our hats or our figures or something like that we just say, 'I'll tell him when he comes in.'"

"What do you call a girl you don't like?—an old timer in the business who tries to run everything?"

"We say," said Miss Niles, "that she's an old bag holding up the backdrop."

I asked these two rational animals if there was much quarreling among the thirty-odd girls in their show.

"Lord, yes," said Miss Niles "One night we smeared Roquefort cheese in one girl's costume It was a hot night She was so mad she didn't speak to any of us for weeks "

"There's another girl," offered Miss Murray, "who doesn't speak to me to this day Dances right next to me and won't speak She had a couple of those little turtles you buy on Broadway She kept them in a small tank on her dressing table and wouldn't let anybody get near them She was absolutely mad about those turtles So one day I went out and bought a little turtle I cut off its head and then I put the head and the body part in a cup of water so it would look like somebody had been having turtle soup Then I took one of her turtles out of her tank and hid it When she came in and saw that one of her turtles was gone and when she saw that cup setting there on her dressing table with the dead turtle in it, my dear, she had hysterics. She cried all night and threw things "



## HATE ON THE HIGHWAY

One of the reasons I enjoy driving a car is that it gives me a chance to get the hate out of my system Hate-on the highway is an institution occupying a gh place in our modern civilization To me it is a very peculiar human institution The godawful glares that drivers exchange as they pass each other, the mutual hatred between motorist and pedestrian, these manifestations seem to constitute the ultimate in righteous wrath Take a group of motorists assembled in a tourist camp They fraternize, talk affably of their experiences on the road, exchange addresses, buy beer for each other, lend one another Lux or liver pills, and sometimes they even put their heads together and sing Let those same people meet on the open highway and hatred for each other occupies their hearts and they scream curses at each other

I have a brother named Sam who has his eccentric moments when he's at the wheel of his car He is not much bigger than a jockey and he has an ungovernable temper plus more courage than befits a lad of his size. He is one of those drivers who scream at

other drivers. He has a fine command of unconventional English and he doesn't care how many large, tough men are occupying the car which offends him; if he considers that they have been driving stupidly, and he usually does, he leans out the window and shrieks bad words at them. You know the type. It is inevitable that now and then one of his targets is going to take serious offense. He is going to slap his foot on the brake and stop his car or truck and get out and approach Sam with intent to kill. But Sam is a wise one. He drives with a hatchet on the front seat beside him. As the wrathful victim of his curses comes charging down on his car, Sam sits placidly behind the wheel, reaches down and picks up the hatchet, and draws it back like an Indian preparing to split a pale-skull. Then, as the enemy comes within range and makes ready to clout Sam or reach in and grab him and drag him through the window and beat him to death, Sam says through his teeth: "Lay a hand on me, you son-of-a-bitch, and your arm comes off at the elbow!" Thus far he has escaped without bruise or blemish, but I have a standing order at a florist shop for a nice wreath. After all, he's my brother.

**CULTURE  
FOR THE BEGINNER**





## OPERA EXPLAINED

Years ago I went to the first performance of Gertrude Stein's opera, *Four Saints in Three Acts*. I thought it was fine. They staged it on a bitterly cold night and many celebrities from the world of art, music, letters, and spread-the-legs dancing attended. I was there as a reporter and I still have the notes I made during the evening.

One of the most thrilling passages in the story came when the Negro cast sang *andante bravura della fuge* and crazy-like a song that went:

"Did he did we did we and did he did he did did he did did did he did did he categorically and did he did he did he did he did he did he in interruption interruption interruptedly leave letting let it be all to me to me out and outer and this and this with in indeed deed and drawn and drawn work."

That is good stuff. Sing it over once. Or let somebody else sing it over for you. Or better than that walk up to a police officer and sing it to him.

Miss Stein's opera was concerned chiefly with Saint Theresa No. 1 and Saint Theresa No. 2 and Saint Ignatius and they performed with a variety of other saints, all portrayed by Negroes, and an assortment of angels. They did things about a telescope and a fish net, and the things they did with these things were quite interesting and set a new cultural high for that year he did he did he did. The plot began to reveal itself when members of the cast started scanning the horizon, searching for an unnamed object. They sang: "How many doors are there in it how many doors are there in it how many doors are there in it how many doors are there in it . . ." and so on for a good, long paragraph until someone, a con-

tralto, got to asking how many eggs there are in it, and one of the angels answered the question by singing "If it were possible to kill five thousand Chinamen by pressing a button would it be done Saint Theresa not interested"

At this juncture Saint Ignatius brought forth his telescope and took a sight on the horizon which was made out of shiny, light blue oilcloth Saint Theresa No 1 then talked Saint Ignatius into letting her borrow the telescope but instead of examining the horizon to find out how many floors, door, windows, and eggs were in it, she aimed it out at the audience, presumably to find out how many paying customers there were in it

I concentrated hard on doors and eggs and five thousand Chinamen just as opera lovers down through the ages have concentrated, such being the method used to get at the core of the matter I was concentrating, striving for the significance of this simple liting thing, when I heard somebody on the stage who wanted to know how many *nails* there are in it That threw me off a bit but right away came this

"Four saints were not born at one time although they knew each other One of them had a birthday before the mother of the other one the father Four saints later to be if to be if to be to be one to be Might tingle"

Certainly, might tingle Also might puke I thought the whole thing most significant, particularly as related to the state of the world at that time, it being different then than now I learned so much that evening that I can't understand for the life of me why the other operas, the ones they have down at the Metropolitan, confuse me



## NATIONAL ANTHEM

At the risk of being hauled up for trying to overthrow the government, I must report that there are a lot of people who are dissatisfied with "The Star Spangled Banner" They argue that it's



## CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER

not a good song because the average citizen can't handle it; that the words are somewhat archaic and that the whole thing compares unfavorably, from a musical point of view, with the French national anthem or even the musical battle cries of most of our colleges. These critics say that we ought to try to get a new national anthem, but they are unwilling to utter a public criticism of the old, on the grounds that they might be slapped in the pokey or even lynched. Well, I'm not going to be the one that says it.



## UNDERSTANDING CABELL

Janet Ayer Fairbank wrote a novel called *The Smiths* in 1905, and ten years later Branch Cabell came up with a book called simply *Smith*. This latter novel came out during the period when its author couldn't make up his mind about his own name. He had achieved a reputation as James Branch Cabell but dropped the James for several years and as Branch Cabell (or Gow) turned out a trilogy called *Smirt*, *Smith*, and *Smire*. Any book bearing the single magniloquent word *Smith* for a title should get more than passing mention here. I have had to read it in a hurry, during a couple of evenings when other people insisted on having the television set going, and it may be that I haven't got out of it all that Branch intended. The book has to do with a Mr. Smith who rules over the Forest of Branlon although he really doesn't, being in actuality a Mr. Smirt who is only dreaming that he is Mr. Smith and who, when he was Mr. Smirt, was dreaming that he was that, too, I think. I never did quite figure out exactly who he was and I assume that in the book that came after *Smith* he (who?) was dreaming that he was Mr. Smire. I'd try to find out, but my back hurts. As for Mr. Smith, during the period when he was dreaming that he was Mr. Smirt, he begot four children by four different women to wit: Tana, who worked for a sinister white rabbit on the moon; Airel, who lived on a glass mountain; Rani, daughter of the South Wind who lived in a paper palace

erected on a weather vane, and Arachne, the Spider Woman who devours her mate (Smirt, maybe?) The book Smith is largely about Mr Smith's magical adventures in getting his four sons out of the dream world of Smirt and into the Forest of Branlon, which is itself a dream world While he is doing it Mr Smith smokes Virginia cigarettes—even while he's having a talk with Charlemagne Some book



## LUNCH WITH EMILY

I had lunch one time with Mrs Post

It was an intimate, cozy little affair, this luncheon, with only a thousand people attending It was held in the grand ballroom of a New York hotel and I was told in advance that I would be seated at Mrs Post's table

I always did want to watch her shovel grub One of the great disappointments of my life was the fact that I missed a dinner a couple of years ago at which Mrs Post got all thumbs and spilled a plate of food all over herself and her immediate neighbors

This luncheon was given for magazine people and at one end of the ballroom were three long tables, set in tiers and occupied exclusively by writers In order to forestall fist fights, hair pulling, and public biting (writers being what they are), the guests were seated in alphabetical order

They had no A people so Libbie Block, the short story writer, was in No 1 position, The line up then proceeded through the three tiers, through such people as Will Cuppy, Walt Disney, Dr Morris Fishbein, Paul Gallico, Margaret Case Harriman, Eric Hatch, Elsa Maxwell, William Lyon Phelps, Jim Street, and right down to the last plate, where the place card said "Michael Strange" Michael Strange is the wild haired poetess who is Diana Barrymore's mama

Mrs Post fell into place about midway of the table where I sat She was between a Mrs Moore and Channing Pollock That doesn't make sense alphabetically, but that's the way it was

## CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER

Before all these people began feeding, I made an earnest effort to chisel into one of the seats on Mrs Post's flank, but sitting next to Emily Post was something both Mrs. Moore and Mr. Pollock wanted to brag about, and they wouldn't yield.

So I made my way down to the end and took my alphabetically correct seat next to Michael Strange, who immediately began talking about Life, Writing, Inspiration, and a piece of property she owns in Connecticut and would like to get rid of

Well, I did everything but crawl up on the table trying to watch Mrs Post in the act of taking on fodder Occasionally, far down the line, she'd bob her head into view, but I couldn't see how she was deporting herself with her food

Owing to the fact that I paid little heed to her conversation and kept knocking over glasses trying to improve my view of Emily Post, my poetic neighbor, Michael Strange, got bored with me and asked me to change seats with her We shifted soup, and Life immediately grew livelier for Michael Strange, for she was now sitting next to Jim Street I heard him ask her, slyly, something about John Barrymore, and she replied

"Young man, I deem you impertinent I ought to slap your face off."

Finally the party broke up and I hurried down the line to grab the people who had been nearest Mrs Post Mrs Moore said that she talked with the etiquette lady all during lunch

"Did she spill anything?" I asked "Did she fumble her forks? Did she sneeze in her asparagus?"

Mrs. Moore said she hadn't noticed anything in the way of mis-cues. Channing Pollock had disappeared so I approached Libbie Block and Katharine Brush, who had been sitting in front of Mrs. Post, though facing away from her Had they noticed anything?

"As a matter of fact," said Miss Block, "I tried to watch her for one reason. I wanted to see if she eats English style or American style. Over here, we cut a piece of meat, then put down the knife and change the fork into the right hand In England they cut the meat as we do, but keep the fork in the left hand and carry the food to the mouth with the left hand I never did catch her at the right

moment. It wouldn't be polite to stare at Emily Post. So I only cast glances."

Thus my report on that luncheon is woefully incomplete. For all I know Emily Post may have burped and then fallen face forward into her string beans. If she did, I missed it. S is too far from P.



## FAINTING ROBINS

Many middle aged and elderly women with money spend their winters in the Santa Fe area, and some of them live there the year round. In time they get bored with the routine of eating, sleeping, and slapping Mum on themselves, and they begin looking around for something in the nature of a hobby. Usually they turn to art or poetry, since there is a superabundance of these commodities around town. They go out and get themselves a fainting robin.

A tradition has come into being by which a well heeled woman "discovers" an aspiring painter or poet and sponsors him. In most cases the beneficiaries of this system are poets—young and hungry men touched by the gentle breath of Euterpe and incapable of any physical exertion beyond manipulating a knife and fork, lifting a shot glass, and making love. These boys, once they get themselves sponsors, are known locally as fainting robins. They are sometimes taken into the homes of their patronesses and fed well and given pocket money, and almost all they have to do in payment is to whack out an occasional poem and recite it to their lady.

Notwithstanding the fact that I have grown too old to dream, I wanted to see a fainting robin, and in time my wish was gratified. He was attending his mistress at a table in the hotel's cocktail lounge. He wasn't much to look at, but neither was she. She was perhaps fifty years old, and her robin appeared to be little more than twenty. The only thing they had in common beyond a love of lyric poetry was lyric buck teeth. Someone told me about them and said they had not been operating long as a team. The boy had been around town for a couple of years, sighing at the desert and

## **CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER**

at the front windows of restaurants. The wage scale for poets is extremely low unless you happen to be a Nick Kenny, and this boy was getting raggeder and hungrier, and then this lady arrived from Philadelphia. She was the widow of an industrialist, and as soon as she got settled in Santa Fe she began noticing that other ladies in her circumstances had their private poets and some had their painters. She investigated the system of sponsorship and liked it and was getting ready to go into business herself when her son back East got wind of it. He came out by fast plane and had a big argument with his mother, but she stood her ground.

"The other ladies out here have their poets," she insisted, "and I'm just as good as they are. You know very well that I've always been a great hand to read poetry, and I want to have my own poet. I think I can find the right one, and if I do I'll back him, and maybe he'll become famous. I'm going to do it, no matter what you say."

"Well," said her son, a man with no esthetic sense whatever, "if you insist on doing it, be careful. Don't ever give your poet anything but cash and don't ever sign anything."

So she had won, and now she had her fainting robin and everybody was happy, except perhaps her son.



## **NAMING THE BABY**

Few parents nowadays strive for any great originality in naming their own get the way they strive for distance and originality in naming their pedigreed dogs. (I must mention, in passing, a little runny-nosed girl who came past my house one day and stopped to talk. In answer to my question she said her first name was Tecla. It wasn't until after she had gone that I realized that this was the modern way to name a child Pearl.) Those old-timers who used biblical passages for names surely enjoyed the business of making a choice. Let us, in dramaturgical form, see if we can visualize the way it worked.

**NAMING THE BABY**

*(The Scene: Interior of a rude dwelling, ancestral home of the Schwartz family. Warming his back before the fire is the happy father, My-Cup-Runneth-Over Schwartz. Sitting near him on an upturned lard bucket is Grandma—U.e-A-Little-Wine-For-Thy-Stomach's-Sake Brokenshire, thrice a widow. As the curtain rises she is sound asleep. Across the room, spooning Jamaica molasses into her day-old infant, is the joyful mother, Sufficient-Unto-The-Day-Is-The-Evil-Thereof Schwartz.)*

**FATHER:** Well, Sufficient-Unto-The-Day-Is-The-Evil-Thereof, my dear, how do you feel?

**MOTHER:** Tuckered.

**FATHER:** There you go! I left you lay in bed all day yesterday. Now, git on with that churnin'.

**MOTHER:** I got to feed little—little—what air his name, My-Cup-Runneth-Over?

**FATHER:** We didn't name him yet. I was jist a-figgerin' we orta name him suthin', now we got him.

**MOTHER:** Don't look at me—it was your doin's!

**FATHER:** God damn you, I'll belt you one with this candle mold if you don't quit that naggin'. Nag, nag, nag—that's all I git outa you! You got any notions about a name fer him?

**MOTHER:** Well, I kinda favor Joe.

**FATHER:** In the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress! *(He turns to the old woman.)* Hey, Use-A-Little-Wine-For-Thy-Stomach's-Sake! Wake up!

**GRANDMA:** Whup. Wurp. Woomp.

**FATHER:** What do you think we orta name the baby?

**GRANDMA:** What babv?

**FATHER:** The one your dopev daughter Sufficient-Unto-The-Day-Is-The-Evil-Thereof had yesterday.

**GRANDMA:** Oh, that one! Well, now, I did give it some thought, come to think of it. How about O-Death-Where-Is-Thy-Sting-Question-Mark Schwartz? That's nice.

## CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER

**FATHER:** Don't like it Got no swing to it. This modern world we live in, you gotta have a name's got rhythm in it I'd like to have him baptized They Sewed Fig Leaves Together- And Made Themselves Aprons Schwartz

**MOTHER** Never! That's a girl's name

**FATHER** Okay, you're so damn smart, why don't you have an idea? And I don't mean any of that crazy Joe stuff neither!

**MOTHER** I want he should have a name that will inspire him to great things so maybe someday he'll have his own cow.

**FATHER** Good God, woman! O Lord, preserve me from this grasping, greedy female!

**MOTHER** I'd like to name him Go To The Ant Thou Sluggard- Consider Her Ways And Be Wise Schwartz I think that sounds real distinguished like He might even grow up to be called for jury duty someday

**FATHER** Well I be consarned! Never thought of that! Sufficient- Unto The Day Is The Evil Thereof, you got a head on you Leave me have another look at that sweet little varmint There you are, Go To The Ant Thou Sluggard- Consider Her Ways And Be Wise, gitchee, gitchee, gitchee!

**MOTHER** Oh, you like the name?

**FATHER** Shore! And listen, Sufficient Unto The Day Is The Evil- Thereof darling—let's have us some more of these little tykes It's so dern much fun namin' them!

**GRANDMA** You do and by God I go back to Ipswich!

(CURTAIN)



## FOLKLORE

There is a vast body of literature in America called folklore In intellectual circles it occupies a special position next to sacred writings For years I have been reading this stuff the way a high school kid reads Shakespeare, and at last I've made up my mind about it.

It is junk. To me the most boresome character ever created in American literature is Paul Bunyan—with the possible exception of Philo Vance (How often I've wished that incomparable stinker would choke to death on one of his beloved Regies!) The tales about Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, Pecos Bill, John Henry, and Mike Fink are recited over and over with reverence. For the most part they are just a little too cute, too precious, the imagination that has gone into them is of low quality, it is on a level with the inventive competence of the Liars' Club of Burlington, Wisconsin. The plain fact is that American folklore in large measure lacks cleverness and would seem to be contrived by small children, yet the cultural highbrow wearing two tweed suits screeches with delight over it.

Let me back and fill just an eighth of an inch and say that occasionally in these long winded legends it is possible to come upon a bit that is amusing, even genuinely funny. It is likewise possible to find a laugh in the writings of Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr if you stay with him long enough.

A man who takes up folklore is plainly a nut, no matter that he is intelligent in other directions. He is first cousin to the man who spends all his spare hours playing with electric trains or the girl who devotes her energies to twirling a baton when she should be learning how to pad herself. Most of these folklorists lose their sense of balance and before long they are poaching on land that doesn't belong to them. In other words the people who collect and chronicle American folklore haven't staked out their property very well. They have filed claims on a good many characters who would seem to belong to straight history rather than to mythology and legend. They have taken over, for example, Wild Bill Hickok and Billy the Kid, Judge Roy Bean and Casey Jones, Johnny Appleseed and Buffalo Bill. Consequently it is difficult for us to say where folklore begins and history ends. The stories about Billy the Kid which appear under the label of folklore are largely straightaway historical narrative, as factual as the works of Douglas Southall Freeman. The folklore of Buffalo Bill is not folklore at all.

The folklore that I am bleating about is the invented story about



the manufactured character, and I herewith propose that Congress pass a law compelling folklorists to confine their cute writings to those characters and stay out of history. Throughout our journey into the West we had trouble distinguishing between folklore and history for the simple reason that no line has ever been drawn, though it was usually possible to distinguish the folklore by its sheer deariness.

In the Black Hills it is a historical fact that the whole region once belonged to the Sioux Indians, yet they stayed out of the hills because they believed they were the dwelling place of their deity. They had all that property under solemn treaty, but refused to set foot on it for fear Manitou would drop a rock on their heads. Then somehow word got out that there was gold in the Black Hills, and along came General Custer with an expedition. Was he looking for gold? Nah. Just poking around the country, seeking a land passage to India or some such thing. Yet at the head of his expedition rode the best gold-mining experts that could be found, and down near the present town of Custer these boys found gold, so the hell with treaties and the hell with Manitou and the hell with Sioux Indians. That was white man's land now. And that is history.

On the other hand the folklorists have their little story about the Black Hills. Paul Bunyan, needing to cover the body of his dead ox, threw up the Black Hills in a single afternoon. I threw up more than that when I read about it.



## HOW TO WRITE FOLKLORE

In the pantheon of American folk heroes, amid the busts of the Bunyans and Crocketts and Boones and Finks, there just had to be a Smith. Thus far comparatively little has been written about him and he isn't mentioned in some of the fat books which purport to cover the major folk legends of the land. His name was Windwagon Smith and he was, to speak conservatively, a doozy. Stanley Vestal of Oklahoma wrote about him a dozen years ago; Wilbur L. Herrmann did a later sketch of him for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and

the most recent account of his exploits appears in Professor Walter Blair's book, *Tall Tale America* (1944). It requires a special sort of talent to write American folklore, and I don't think I have it; I'll try it just this one time.

Tom Smith was a Yankee sailor in the days of the clipper ships. Becalmed once in the South Seas, he picked up a book about the Western plains. He read of the wagon trains and the slow and painful work of getting them across the prairies. He recognized the trouble at once—the motive power was at fault, the oxen and the mules were inadequate. When he got back to Massachusetts, Smith sat down and gave the matter some thought. He almost invented the gasoline engine, but not quite. He got to thinking of the prairie in terms of the open sea, a prairie, he reasoned, is actually nothing more than a dry ocean and should be treated as such. He went to work and built himself a prairie schooner in his back yard, up there in Massachusetts, while his seafaring neighbors stood around and scoffed, using their index fingers to make circular motions in the neighborhood of their sideburns. In the manner of all great (and crazy) men, Smith ignored the derision of the mob, saying only, "I dad, they laughed at Clumbus too!"

His wagon conformed to the general specifications of a standard prairie schooner, but there were differences. Above the canvas top he built a deck, and projecting from the center of the deck was a tall mast. There was no rigging at the prow for hitching oxen or mules, the craft was to be steered with a tiller which moved the rear wheels, and there was a rope ladder for mounting to the deck. When he got all this completed Smith fashioned his sail, installed his binnacle, packed his sextant and telescope, thumbed his nose at his neighbors, and went zipping out of Massachusetts.

The town of Westport in Missouri was the jumping off place for the wagon trains, and the citizens were more than mildly astonished one day when the windwagon came sailing down the main street, her skipper standing proudly on the bridge and bellowing: "Avast there, mulelubbers, sheer off!" Ignoring the livery stable, Windwagon Smith docked in front of a tavern, dropped his anchor, gathered in his sail, came down the rope ladder, and swaggered into the bar, where he confused everyone present by ordering hot

rum, unbuttered. The townspeople crowded around him, inspecting his sou'wester, his gold earrings, and the naked women tattooed on his arms. They were slow to realize that he had come out to revolutionize Western transportation.

The businessmen of Westport were skeptical (they had but recently voted down parking meters) and wouldn't have a thing to do with the windwagon until its skipper had given them another demonstration, cruising over to Council Grove and back, then maneuvering his craft briskly up and down Westport's main street. It was an impressive exhibition, even to the mules of the town. One of these, possessed of a woman's intuition, is said to have watched the performance for a while and then quietly committed suicide by eating rhubarb tops.

Having convinced the town that he could reduce the travel time over the Santa Fe trail by at least six weeks, Windwagon Smith announced the formation of the Westport & Santa Fe Dry Ocean Navigating Company, Inc. Leading citizens bought stock in the company, and work was started on a super windwagon, double the size of the big prairie schooner.

When it was finished, preparations were made for the launching, and Windwagon invited the principal stockholders to participate in the shakedown cruise. So these favored individuals put on claw hammer coats, and some speeches were made (the Secretary of the Navy had been invited but couldn't come), and a band played "Red Sails in the Sunset," which hadn't been written yet. Big Nose Kate, a winsome lady who ran a tent of ill repute on the edge of town, broke a bottle of 101-gut across the brow of the wooden Indian which served as figurehead, the skipper uttered the traditional cry of "All ashore that's goin' ashore," and cast off. The super-windwagon moved out onto the prairie, riding faultlessly. Satisfied that she was landworthy, Smith now crowded on full sail and she began to fly across the rolling plains. In no time at all the leading citizens of Westport began to turn assorted shades of green, and soon some of them were hanging over the rails feeding the prairie dogs. The skipper turned back, uttering mighty profanities, cursing the Missouri landlubbers, and they in turn spoke feelingly of him as a fiend out of hell. The windwagon got back into town

and the passengers staggered ashore, heading as one man for the little saloon kept by old Mother Sill Windwagon Smith, however, purpled the welkin with shouts of contempt for the yellow bellied landlubbers, turned his mighty vessel around, and rolled out of town. He had a favoring wind and disappeared over the western horizon quickly, and nobody ever heard of him again. Yet he left his mark in Missouri—from that day to this a native of the state is known as a Puke.

I've spent half my life glorying in my ignorance. I'm definitely on the side of the stenographer who stood with her girl friend in Rockefeller Center, contemplating the sideways statue of Prometheus.

"Who's it supposed to be?" asked the girl friend.

"Don't be a dope, Hazel," said the stenographer. "That's Promiscuous."

There have been times when I've made halfhearted gestures in the direction of Culture. For example, I once went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and spent two full hours trying to discover a reason for it. Again, I attended the first performance of Gertrude Stein's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*—the one in which the pigeons were on the grass, alas. I have gone to a French made movie, a symphony concert, and a party at which New York City's leading debutantes, all creatures of Culture, rode kiddie cars around a dance floor screeching like commoners and showing their hams. Once I bought a copy of Joyce's *Ulysses* and applied myself to it three evenings in a row. After that I put it in the back corner of a clothes closet to drive off moths. When, at last, the fact finally bore in upon me that I was not made for Culture, I gave it up and devoted myself from there on out to being an unpleasant beast of the field.

If you are a cultural bird head like myself, with an overwhelming desire to go look at a ballet, I think I can give you a solid tip. If you go to a ballet and if you see someone entre chatting and if it's a man

## **CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER**

entre-chatting and he entre-chats more than ten times, cheer and whistle and stamp your feet. That'll show you know something.



### **DALI'S GRASSHOPPERS**

I've never discovered why Dali puts crutches in his pictures, but I've come on a story which explains the grasshoppers. The grasshopper is a symbol of Dali's father.

When he was a little boy in Spain he didn't like his father because his father thwarted him. His father didn't want him to be an artist. Frustration stuff. In those days, by his own account, Salvador enjoyed nothing so much as going out in the fields to lie on the grass and dream. Whenever he did this the grasshoppers bothered him and interrupted his dreams. So he got to thinking of grasshoppers whenever he thought of his father, and the grasshopper became the symbol for his father. Thus, whenever he gets the urge, he puts a grasshopper into his pictures. That's his paw.



### **SHERIDAN**

Read some in a book about Richard Brinsley Sheridan. He had a quick wit. Once he staggered out of a pub and fell heavily to the ground and when a passer by rushed to his assistance he had enough presence of mind in all that fog to murmur a single sentence "I am Mr Wilberforce".\* One can learn so many practical things from reading the lives of great men.



### **HEAD COCKING**

There is a quarrel between American and British book publishers and it has been going on for years. It concerns the manner in which

\*William Wilberforce, a paragon of moral rectitude, the father of the temperance movement.

the book's title is lettered on the spine of the volume The English book title begins at the bottom and runs up the spine, the American runs down The English argue that a customer standing before a shelf of books finds it easier to cock his head to the left to read the titles, the Americans say poppycock—the human neck-knuckles work smoother when the head is cocked to the right On both sides of the Atlantic committees of dignified and scholarly men have stood before bookshelves containing both English and American volumes, and they have cocked their heads one way, and then the other, and then back again, until their necks were stiff and their attitudes stiffer Neither side will yield and it is conceivable that this matter could someday lead to a shooting war; they had one once over a man's ear, if I know anything at all about history (which I don't), bitterness over bookstore head-cocking could easily throw us back to 1812



## THE AMERICAN BAYREUTH

A long time ago there was a woman named Lillian Norton, a native of Farmington, Maine She grew up with a terrible affliction—she sang soprano—and because of this disfigurement she changed her name to Lillian Nordica and sought sanctuary in one of the few places where soprano singers are allowed to sing soprano, the Metropolitan Opera She moved to Westchester County and, around 1907, announced that she was establishing “an American Bayreuth” a few miles to the west of where your historian now lives One of the things she did was to get Isadora Duncan interested Isadora Duncan was a woman with a good deal of joy de vivre and one major fault she couldn't hold still She was always snatching up scarves and leaping around in the fields, this being her way of demonstrating that her digestion was good So we had, on the one hand, Madame Nordica singing soprano and Isadora Duncan bounding through the woods, and this was the beginning of the American Bayreuth Artists and musicians and writers and actors joined the colony, and a little theater was built on the shore

## **CULTURE FOR THE BEGINNER**

of the Croton River, and before long the river itself was stocked with gondolas and singing gondoliers. My, but it must have been a sight! Isadora Duncan brought her pupils up from New York and whole bevvies of scarf-wavers were bounding over hill and dale, caressing trees, speaking to fenceposts, and standing on the ends of their toes. It got to be quite a thing, and week ends would find the neighborhood teeming with celebrities up from New York—David Belasco, Madame Melba, Channing Pollock, Bayard Veiller, Margaret Wycherly, Irving Berlin, Elsie Janis, Heywood Broun, George Jean Nathan, Franklin P. Adams, Nora Bayes, Herbert Bayard Swope, and God knows who else. But the American Bayreuth petered out. Jeanne Eagels came up and built a house and lived out her days. Lenore Ulric and Gloria Swanson had houses in the neighborhood, but today there is scarcely a remnant of the American Bayreuth.



## **ORIGINAL RESEARCH**

The head Indian in my immediate neighborhood was Chief Wampus. His people had several camps, or villages, scattered around these parts. One of the camps was at the foot of Old Roaring Brook Road—at the point where it crosses Roaring Brook, hard by the Reader's Digest building.

In the Chappaqua Library is an ancient pamphlet which says this was the last Indian village in Westchester. In 1848 a new encampment was established on the site by contractors engaged in extending the Saw Mill River Parkway from Chappaqua to Mount Kisco. Several shacks were put up and the contractors moved in enough bulldozers to flatten the Alps. One afternoon I called at the construction camp and approached a heavy-set man and said:

"You've sure been making the dirt fly around here."

"Yep," he said

"Have you turned up any Indian artifacts?"

"Any what?"

"Artifacts. Arrowheads, pottery—stuff the Indians made."

"We're buildin' a road here," he said

"Yes, I know But there used to be an Indian village on this spot and I figured with all the digging and all, you might have turned up some artifacts "

"Look," said the man "We re buildin' a road " He lowered his voice and spoke soothingly, paternally "It's a right hard job, buildin' a great big road like this Now why don't you get back in your heap and go on home and almost before you know it we'll have a nice big wide road for you, all paved with concrete, and flars growin' along the shoulders "

"Okay," I said "Thanks for everything "

I got in my car and drove home

This is known as research Original research



## IN DIGEST ION

By the latest count the *Digest* had fifty eight editors It is almost a sure thing, then, if you live near the place, that someday one of those editors is going to get lost and wander onto your property. There is a sort of tradition in the neighborhood, however, that in such circumstances they shouldn't be shot, and nobody sets traps for them



# THE WRITING TRADE





## BOOK REVIEWER

Years ago when I was employed on the *Denver Post* there came a period when that newspaper hired a literary editor. I pestered her from dawn to dusk pleading for the honor of writing some book reviews. Finally she gave me a volume, a war book, and I reviewed it. I said that it was the greatest war book ever written, not excluding *The Red Badge of Courage*. Miss Bancroft toned my review down a bit, but I think she was impressed by my reference to *The Red Badge of Courage*, which suggested that I had been around in the world of literature, the fact is I had never read it, but had only heard about it. The second book she gave me was a collection of short stories, and in my review I said that this was the greatest book of short stories ever published. She spoke to me gently after that one, suggesting that I get control of myself, and tried me once again with a travel book called *The Desert Road to Turkestan*. This book, I wrote, was far and away the finest travel book ever put together by mortal man. I turned the review in and Miss Bancroft struck me off her list.



## RAISE IN PAY

The United Press mail service included a book review column written by Paul White. When Paul went to the Columbia Broadcasting System the job was left open. The work had to be done on the side, but the reviewer got all the books. Several of us asked for the job, but I got it in lieu of a raise. Bob Bender, the general news manager of the U P, called me in and said

"You have been asking for a raise I can't give it to you right now but I'll give you the book column You sell most of the books you get, and I understand it strikes a year round average of fifteen dollars a week That's the same as a raise of fifteen dollars a week"

So I became a literary critic, and the books piled into my home. Every two weeks a young man came round and carried away all volumes I didn't want to keep, paying me fifty cents each, whether they were ten dollar books or twenty five cent pamphlets This was a common practice among book reviewers, and, of course, it infuriated the publishers Some of them tried to stop it by stamping "Review Copy" all through each book sent out to the critics I don't think it ever did much good



## STEINBECK

I've never known an author who wasn't eccentric in one way or another Steinbeck, for example

Steinbeck came to New York back in 1938 after *Of Mice and Men* hit the best seller lists He fairly crept into town because he knew the New York interviewers would be after him and, at that time anyway, he was inclined to go all to pieces in the presence of an inquisitive newspaperman I was then working on a newspaper and, having heard a rumor that Steinbeck was in town, I called up my friend George Joel, who was then an executive of the company which published the *Californian's* books George approached Steinbeck and Steinbeck said NO George kept after him, however, and finally beat him down, and Steinbeck said he'd meet me at the publishing house the next morning at eleven

As I learned later he arrived at his publisher's at ten He walked in with an unopened bottle of brandy under his arm, entered Pat Covici's private office, sat down at a table, and asked that someone fetch him a pitcher of water and two glasses From ten to eleven he sat there drinking brandy When I arrived I was ushered into another office and George Joel went to see if Steinbeck were ready Steinbeck took one final snort of brandy, thumped the glass down on the table, and said

## ~~THE WRITING TRADE~~

Bring on the son of a bitch!"

He had two thirds of the bottle of brandy inside of him by that time and it was a delightful interview. He answered any and all questions that were put to him, and every few minutes he'd take another sip and cry out:

*"With lecherous howls,  
I deflower young owls!"*

Toward the end of the interview my photographer arrived and Steinbeck seemed to regard him as a sort of savior. He all but embraced the cameraman, posed for eight or ten different pictures (including two with the brandy bottle), and then wrote an extensive inscription in a copy of his latest book for his new friend.

Not long ago I ran into this same photographer on a subway and during our conversation I asked him if he still had his Steinbeck book.

"My what?" he said.

"That book Steinbeck—John Steinbeck—autographed for you that day—the guy with the bottle of brandy."

"Oh, that!" he said. "You mean that book he gave me. Nah, I don't know what happen to it. Funny thing about that. I read that book. Had one of these unhappv endings to it. Only had one dame in it and she was a b. . . ad. What the hell's a guy wanna write a book like that for? Where do you dig up these screwballs, anyway?"



## DEATH OF A HERO

So, at last, I arrived at the abode of Jame Street and learned of the death of Sam Dabney.

Sam Dabney is a fictional character, a man in a book. He made his appearance four years ago as the chief character in a thick historical novel called *Oh, Promised Land*. The book had a large success and most people who read it developed an affection for its hero. Sam Dabney was a strapping, handsome guy who galloped and fought and loved through eight hundred odd pages of Jim Street's book.

Jim was now at work on a sequel to his novel, a book called *Tap Roots*. Came a day when, secluded in his study, a crisis arrived. He got up from his work, went into the living room, lit a cigarette, and sat staring at the floor for half an hour. Then he went out and walked around the block a couple of times. There was no way out of it, he at last concluded. He had to kill off Big Sam Dabney.

Quite likely you cannot imagine what it meant to him, what a shocking job it was for him to go back to his desk and do the unhappy deed. Sam Dabney was as close to him, as real to him, as any human being on earth. Around the Street house they had talked about Sam for years just as though he were a member of the family. And a good deal of that feeling about Big Sam had been transmitted to the friends of the Street family.

Jim kept quiet about the job he had to do and went grimly ahead with it. He killed Big Sam Dabney there at his typewriter around eleven-thirty at night when the house was quiet. He got the whole business, the whole deathbed scene, out of the way and then he went out and sat down in the living room. Lucy, his wife, kept watching him. She rather suspected from his behavior that he was about to take down with a fever or a case of author's pip. At length she said to him:

"Jimmie, what on earth is the matter with you? Are you sick?"

"I just killed Big Sam," he said.

"Jimmie!"

Well, you never saw the beat of it after that. Lucy said later that her first impulse was to send off a telegram to the two Street boys who were away at school. There were ructions. She told her husband that she wouldn't stand for it, that he could march right back in to that typewriter and revive Big Sam.

The house virtually went into mourning for a week. Lucy telephoned family friends and gave them the sad news. People called to find out all the facts. One girl, particularly hipped on the passing of Big Sam, drove in fifteen miles from Long Island, walked into the house, and said:

"How did it happen?"

Jim assured her that Sam Dabney died quietly.

## THE WRITING TRADE

"What was it?" she demanded.

"Cancer," said Jim "He had a cancer. You knew that."

The young woman almost flung a conniption

"You simply can't do it to him that way," she said "That's too painful You ought to be ashamed of yourself You've got to change it to something else "

"Listen," said Jim, "I'm not going through it again He's dead. He couldn't live forever, and that's the way he had to die "

"Well," snapped the young lady, 'all I can say, Jim Street, is that you're a mean, hateful person and a murderer!"



GENE FOWLER

One day a tremendously important meeting was held in an office on the Paramount lot The meeting had something to do with the United Artists organization Among those attending were Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, Sam Goldwyn, Joseph Schenck, and William Gibbs McAdoo Mr Fowler chose that day to show up at the studio He assembled a few crapulous friends and they adjourned to a near by groggery In the course of time Mr. Fowler's spirit burgeoned and oceans of vigor began to crowd into his athletic frame Someone mentioned the mighty conference then in progress across the street Mr Fowler quietly slipped away from his companions

The meeting was being held in a room attached to one of the big sound stages It was a hot day and one window stood open The celebrated participants were hard at work, rendering decisions that would affect the future of the whole movie industry Suddenly a head appeared at the open window The head spoke

"Nurmi Lap one "

Then it was gone

Half a minute later it popped in view again

"Nurmi Lap two "

This sort of thing went on with distressing and clocklike regularity Lackeys were sent out to do something about it Yet nothing was accomplished That head kept showing up and saying

"Nurmi. Lap thirty-nine."

The celebrated personalities inside didn't know the identity of the man who was disrupting their earth shaking ponderings. Someone offered a suggestion that the studio police be notified and instructed to shoot the pest—just wing him, not kill him.

"Nurmi," said the head "Lap forty seven "

Then Harry Brand was summoned. The conference demanded what in the hell was going on and why wasn't something being done about it.

"It's Gene Fowler," Mr. Brand told them "He's just running around the outside of the sound stage—just getting a little exercise. I think he's weakening and if you'll only—"

"Nurmi Lap fifty two "

"—if you'll only," continued Mr. Brand, "be a bit patient, he'll wear himself out and fall down "

Mr. Brand was right. Nurmi was on lap sixty three when he went down. His marathon, though it contributed to the general tone of the historic meeting, was not mentioned in the minutes.



H. G. WELLS

During the years I've been in New York I've interviewed many Brits. Once I went to a small luncheon for H. G. Wells and chiseled into a chair two seats removed from the great man. I sat in rapt silence, scarcely daring to lift a fork for fear I would miss a few words of his casual discourse. All through that luncheon he spoke of only one thing. He said he didn't like green peas, he could not remember ever having liked green peas and he was confident he would go to his grave disliking green peas.



THORNE SMITH

The late Thorne Smith was a great man though not very tall. Thorne's books had just started selling well when I went to inter-



## THE WRITING TRADE

visit him. He was living in a dingy basement apartment in Greenwich Village and the first thing I asked him was "How does it feel to be the author of a best seller?"

"Well," he said, "it's a great thing. You see that shelf of books over there?"

He indicated a row of faded and ragged volumes

"It used to be," he said, "that I could grab up all those books and carry them around the corner to a little bookstore, and the man who runs the store would give me enough money to buy a bottle of gin. Then when I got a job or sold a piece of writing, I'd go around and reclaim the books

He turned and looked again at the books, and there was a sly grin on his face when he concluded

"Now—now that I'm a best seller, I can go around to the bookstore and the man will give me enough money for a bottle of gin and I don't have to take the books with me!"



## DREISER

Theodore Dreiser thought he had a sharp memory. He wrote a book of 589 pages about his infancy and adolescence. Among other things he remembered how he crawled across the floor to his mother and found that her shoes had holes in them, whereupon a great sorrow came upon him. I, too, have a good memory. I can remember going to Caleb Smith's brickyard. I remember precisely what it looked like. Just a lot of bricks.



## DIALECT

Today, if you quote an Italian American precisely, or a Negro, or a Jew, or a Dodger fan, setting down in print the exact construction these people give their phrases and sentences, you identify yourself with the forces of Fascist reaction, you are looked upon as a narrow person, heavy laden with intolerance. In other words, when a writer

Interviews Joe Louis, he should go back to his typewriter and set down the thoughts and opinions of Joe Louis in the language that Gene Tunney uses, and the same for Primo Carnera, and Sam Goldwyn, and Red Barber, and Gregory Ratoff, and my pop Carried to its logical conclusion, this movement would eliminate from American literature such performers as Roark Bradford, Arthur Kober, and Ring Lardner. If restrictions are to be imposed on dialect writing, they must cover the whole field, you can't very well say that one dialect is permissible while another is not. It looks to me as if we were headed for our own little Burning of the Books, and that the bonfire will have to include the writings of Bradford, Kober, and Lardner, along with much of Mark Twain, and Finley Peter Dunne, and Octavus Roy Cohen, and Erskine Caldwell, and some of John Steinbeck (certainly that wonderful *Tortilla Flat*), and our old friend James Whitcomb Riley. The list could be stretched out a mile. It is my opinion that the people who are agitating against the use of dialect are shortsighted even though their motives are good. Just recently I witnessed a motion picture involving an all Negro cast. The dialogue, from beginning to end, was as close to the dialogue of Amos 'n Andy as it is possible to get and equally close to the dialogue to be heard in the bar at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. I could no more set down a story as told by a Negro maid in my home in the language of Gabriel Heatter than I could set down a story told by Pop employing the phrasing of Franklin D. Roosevelt. If the boys put over their campaign, it looks like tree surgery or running an addressograph or a milk route for me.

## THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Jack Woodford has certain peculiarities when it comes to theorizing about writing. For one thing, he has long contended that an author should practice absolute celibacy whenever engaged on a writing project. He can have that one. And for another thing, he claims that he writes with his subconscious. I read somewhere not long ago that Katharine Brush does this too. In his efforts to explain his technique, Mr. Woodford confuses me no end.

He sits down at a typewriter and starts writing—with his conscious mind operating. He goes along for a few pages and suddenly he slips into the subconscious, and then whammety-whammety-wham for hours at a stretch. I suppose, when he finally finishes for the day, he gathers up his copy, climbs into a chair, and says: "Now. Let's see what I wrote. Wonder what it's about. Sure hope it's fiction."

I'd like to try the Woodford system but I don't know how to go about it. For one thing, I've got to stay fairly conscious while I'm writing because I have to get up now and then to look at the dictionary or go to the bathroom. And I've never been able to interpret the psychological considerations that enter into my writing. I don't want to waste my time figuring out what's going on in my head that makes me write the way I'm writing because then I won't have time to write anything except what I have figured out is going on that makes me write down on paper what I have figured out. The hell with that.



## LITERARY LICENSE

In *Look Homeward*, Ansel Thomas Wolfe was writing the story of his own early life, and in the beginning of the book he did some A-No.-1 remembering. He remembered many things that happened to him, or around him, when he was three years old, and even younger; he even recorded the thoughts and sensations that came to him as he lay in his crib. I suppose that is a form of literary license, but I don't believe there is much integrity attached to it. Thomas Wolfe was a most unusual guy and influenced the writing of every contemporary author in America except me. Maybe he did remember his didy days, but I'm inclined to think he made it all up. This literary license gag can sometimes be overdone. I've never been able to understand, for example, how one man writing a biography about another man who is dead can set down the thoughts of his subject during childhood and adolescence. I couldn't do it about myself, because I can't remember what I thought about, if anything.



## THE GHOST WRITER

I said that there is a type of ghost that flourishes in America—the ghost writer—and explained how so many people who are prominent in fields other than writing hire other people to write under their names, several widely syndicated columnists, for example, often don't even see their columns until they are in print, and there are instances in which best selling books, bearing the names of famous people, have been written by someone else right in the office of the publisher, and I said that the most honorable of newspaper publishers and the most upright and ethical of book publishers countenance this practice, and even encourage it. I said that this is rather outrageous, considering that such books and columns and magazine articles are placed on the market in competition with the books and columns and articles of people who do the writing themselves. "A writer," I said, "spends most of his life learning a very difficult trade and then these people who are unable to write an intelligent sentence come along and perpetrate a fraud, and actually they are taking dollars out of the pockets of real writers." The real authors themselves, I said, should expose the counterfeit authors. I said that I didn't think anything would ever be done about it, for the reason that it was too well established as a general practice, and for the further reason that the American public has always taken great delight in being swindled.



## COMPLAINTS FROM READERS

Save in the most obvious circumstances an author can never be certain when he is going to offend his readers. A few years ago I fabricated a novel which had a cat as its principal character. Several of my friends warned me that I was laying myself open to vilification and perhaps even physical danger. I could not, they said, write an entire book about a cat without enraging either the cat lovers of

## ~~THE~~ WRITING TRADE

the world or the cat haters of the same world. The feeling seemed to be that I would be assaulted from both camps. So the book was published and I sat back with a carbine across my lap waiting for the enemy. Nothing happened. One forlorn little letter came from a lady who happened to be a cat lover and who decreed that I was *en rapport* with cats and had done well by them.

The next book I wrote was about an unsentimental excursion into the Midwest, and in it was a brief account of a visit to a soda fountain where I had jerked syrup as a boy. I complained in print about the degeneration of the banana split, describing how the girl at the fountain went about composing the dish and then recalling the magnificence of the banana split as constructed around 1920.

I never got so much abuse over anything in my life. People wrote from all over the country denouncing me for a barbarian, a quack, and a bungler of crushed nuts.



## THE SHAKESPEARE QUESTION

During lunch one day in London I remarked that the building occupied by the club seemed to be quite old, and Dugdale said, "Oh, no, not at all. Only about two hundred years." Then I asked Mr. Stephen Potter if he was aware of the fact that the Earl of Oxford was actually the author of all Shakespeare's works. He was eating beef pie, using the left-handed ploy, but he stopped and stared at me a long moment and then said, "Really?" I said there was no question about it—the matter had been proved beyond question of a doubt. "Yes," he said, "it is probably true. So many of the old beliefs are being shattered. I have it on good authority that a small colored boy wrote the poems of Walt Whitman."



## VULGARITY IN BOOKS

There is a good deal of vulgarity, in a sexual way, in Mr. Anderson's book\* but I skipped those parts. It is a shame that this young man is not more *frank and Polish*, by Oliver Anderson. Arthur Barker Ltd., London.

author, with such a fine satirical touch, should recognize that sex exists, and should pretend that people talk about it and think about it and even, at times, indulge in it. However, I feel that Mr. Anderson will grow up—mature as I have matured, he will learn from the hard school of experience. On finishing his novel I decided to go back and read the sex parts I had skipped, so that I might increase my knowledge of the things that one is to avoid. Lord! The way that young fellow writes about sex! Make a man bite the knobs off the dresser drawers!



## WRITERS IN AMERICA

In America we know writers for what they are—insufferable troublemakers. Unless he can catch a lot of fish like Ernest Hemingway, a man who writes in America is a man incapable of making an honest living, a pantywaist sort of person indulging in a profession that is close kin to working in needlepoint, rug hookery and crying at weddings. When I applied for my passport in New York I made a mistake by identifying myself as a writer. Where other people with respectable occupations were pushed through in a hurry, I was cross-examined at some length. I had to go out and get letters from well bred horse traders in the business community to show that I am not a bolshevik, a Luddite, a Technocrat, an Anabaptist, a Bevanite or a typhoid carrier. In the end I convinced them that I don't believe in anything, and am therefore safe.



## LITERARY INTERVIEW

On the day that Sinclair Lewis was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature his publishers telephoned that he was driving in from Connecticut with his wife, a Miss Thompson, and that Mr. Lewis would sit for an interview within the hour.

I started out of the World building and was walking toward the subway entrance, when Bowen of the INS swished past me.

## ~~THE WRITING TRADE~~

Twenty minutes later I found him in the small crowd at the publishing house. There was a hard glint in his eye.

Sinclair Lewis came in and sat at a desk. The ladies and gentlemen of the press faced him, sitting in folding chairs brought in from a nearby funeral parlor. As the first American to win the Nobel award took his seat Bowen of the I N S seized one of the folding chairs, marched up to the desk, placed it alongside Lewis, stuck his face into the novelist's face and announced firmly

"I'm Bowen of the I N S. Congratulations."

Lewis looked at him, then at the rest of us, shrugged his lean shoulders and grinned. Whereupon Bowen of the I N S sat down, back turned to the other reporters, and sprawled himself out on the desk so that he could gaze directly, at a distance of two feet, into the features of Sinclair Lewis.

Alarm came into the eyes of Lewis. He stared at Bowen of the I N S for a long time, then slowly stood up.

"Perhaps," he said to Bowen, "perhaps you would like to sit in my chair."

"Ha!" cried Bowen of the I N S. "That's a good one! No, I'll stay right where I am. How does it feel?"

"How does *what* feel?" asked Lewis, slipping back into his chair.

"To win this prize," said Bowen of the I N S.

"Well," said Lewis, trying to make the best of an uncomfortable situation, knowing the rest of us were sitting there watching the little drama, realizing that he had to handle himself carefully or run the risk of making an ass of himself. "Well,

Bowen of the I N S didn't wait for the answer.

"Listen," he said, leaning even closer to Lewis, "what're you gonna expose next?"

Lewis glanced appealingly over the room.

"What do you mean, what am I gonna expose next?"

"I mean," persisted Bowen of the I N S, "what're you gonna expose next?"

"What have I exposed already?" challenged Lewis.

"Babbitt," snapped Bowen of the I N S. "You exposed Babbitt and all the others, and now I wanna know what's next on the list."

**Lewis was patently irritated.**

"Young man," he said, "I'm not, as you have it, gonna expose nothin' next I'm not in the exposin' business I'm——"

"Oh yes, you are," cried Bowen of the I N S "I want a yarn out of this about what's next Now, come on What'll it be next?"

"God damn it," said Lewis, "I told you I'm not in the business of exposing things I'm a novelist I write novels I don't go around——"

"Ah h h h!" said Bowen of the I N S and, turning to face the rest of us, grinned knowingly and winked, letting us know he was in control of this situation Then he turned back to the furious winner of the Nobel Prize "Let's have it," he insisted "What're you gonna expose next?"

Sinclair Lewis sat and looked at Bowen of the I N S for a long time Then he got up from his chair, walked around the desk and faced the rest of us Someone—I think it was Louis Sherwin—went up to Bowen of the I N S and whispered in his ear What he whispered I don't know, but Bowen of the I N S abandoned his quest for an answer to that question, and the rest of us took over. It was pretty dull, too, after Bowen dropped out



## **BELLY BUTTON LINT**

I am slightly acquainted with a novelist who appears to be normal in all respects who has on two separate occasions revealed to me the burning ambition that is the motivating force of his life and labor

He wants a pillow stuffed with belly button lint

In all seriousness he told me that he looks forward to the day when he gets enough surplus cash to hire a clever agent whose job it will be to collect the belly button lint It may takes years, the novelist agrees, but it can be done The agent will have the task of probing thousands of belly buttons before he is finished He'll have to gain the confidence of the owners of belly buttons first—a terrific job in itself I don't know for sure what I'd say to him if he came to



He and asked me for the lint out of my belly button. I don't need it, but I might be inclined to consider my belly-button lint to be property of such an intimate nature that I wouldn't be willing to have it stuffed in a pillow

The novelist has spent days on end thinking about the project and he has told me of certain angles that worry him. First of all, he must be sure of his agent's integrity. He can't take a chance on hiring some guy who'd cheat—who'd disappear for a couple of years and then come around with a gunny sack full of stuff which he claimed was pure belly button lint. Moreover, the agent would have to demand full co-operation from all prospects. He could never permit a prospect to go out of the room and then come back with the lint from his or her belly button. The prospect might cheat too. The extraction would have to be performed right there on the spot, with the agent removing the lint, or the owner of the belly button removing it before the agent's eyes and handing it over. You can readily see how it would take a long time to collect enough belly-button lint to stuff a pillow

I've had a great deal of enjoyment myself, speculating over various phases of the project. I've even worked out a series of advertisements which the novelist and his agent might use to simplify their search. Offer five dollars per helping for belly button lint. Startle the public with the information that their belly button lint is valuable. Splash display ads around, in this manner

DON'T THROW IT AWAY!  
THE BELLY BUTTON LINT MAN  
WILL BE AROUND TO SEE YOU!  
HAVE YOUR WHOLE FAMILY  
SAVE BELLY BUTTON LINT  
AND ENJOY A VACATION  
IN BEAUTIFUL VERMONT!

As I said, this novelist is altogether serious and I feel sure that, if they don't back the wagon up to his door, he'll eventually get that

pillow. He doesn't want the pillow for ornament. Nor does he want it for bragging purposes. I might be able to understand his ambition, if he simply wanted to have such a pillow lying around, so he could startle guests in his home by saying "See that pillow over yonder—the pink one? Stuffed with belly button lint" But that isn't the idea at all. He wants that pillow for one reason and one reason only—to sleep on. Personally, I'd charge noney to sleep in the same room with a pillow stuffed with belly button lint



## THE SMITH OF SMITHS

The greatest of all Smiths, to my way of thinking, was Sydney. Hesketh Pearson wrote a biography of Sydney under the title, *The Smith of Smiths*. I have read it, and I have also read an ancient volume called *Wit and Wisdom of the Rev Sydney Smith Being Selections from His Writings and Passages of His Letters and Table-Talk with a Biographical Memoir and Notes*. It is by Evert A. Duyckinck. I mean the book is by Evert A. Duyckinck. It doesn't say who wrote the title but obviously Evert couldn't have written the book and the title.



## CHARLES FORT

Charles Fort attracted national attention for a brief time because of his vigorous clapperclawing of the scientists and particularly because Theodore Dreiser was obsessed with the idea that the Bronx iconoclast was a Titan. Dreiser literally forced the first of Fort's books into print, and his admiration for Fort's work inspired the formation of the Fortean Society.

At the time of the meeting I had not read the Fortean writings but I did investigate his books later and I spent an afternoon with him at his apartment in the Bronx.

He was the son of an Albany storekeeper, and it may well be that, as a young man, the peculiar direction his mind was to take was sug-

gested by a member of the Astor clan. John Jacob Astor II toyed with the idea which Fort later called "teleportation." Astor's novel, *A Journey in Other Worlds*, was popular when Fort was a boy and dealt with the operation of a force which the author called "apergy"—the reverse of gravitation.

Fort believed in such a force. He cited in his writings scores of instances in which objects have been swished off the earth to vanish in space. Among these mysterious disappearances were not a few human beings who were standing in the middle of the road one moment and gone forever in the next. He called attention, for example, to the simultaneous disappearance of Ambrose Bierce in Mexico and Ambrose Small in Canada. Was someone perhaps collecting Ambroses? He suspected as much.



## LETTER OF REGRET

I've prepared a little form letter and handed it over to my publishers with instructions to mail it to any and all individuals or organizations soliciting my services as a speaker.

Here is the letter:

Dear (Sir) (Madam)

We regret to inform you that Mr. Smith will be unable to address the \_\_\_\_\_  
at \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_.

Mr. Smith informs us that he recently has acquired a skin disease called impetigo which requires periodic and vigorous scratching. Up to now he has been able to do his own scratching, but he finds it impossible to concentrate on anything else when that duty is before him. He feels that if he appeared before you as a speaker, the impetigo itch would come upon him and, in order to continue his talk, it would be necessary for someone else to stand alongside him and claw him. He has no valet to perform this service and his wife bites her fingernails and therefore is not competent in that direction. Therefore, you might have to scratch him while he lectured.

Mr. Smith has had his affliction for six months. I'm sure you would be interested to know that during those six months he has found it impossible to take a bath. At the present writing he smells like an old gymnasium.

Yours very truly,

ABNER DOUBLEDAY

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & Co.



EDWARD STANLEY

One day Edward Stanley, the author of *Thomas Forty*, came to my house. I had known him years before, when we were newspapermen in Manhattan. I thought perhaps he might step out on my front lawn, sweep the horizon with his steel-gray eyes, and say: "God's teeth! I've been searching for this spot for months! This is the hill George Washington himself used as an observation post, spying out the movements of the enemy. Here he sat astride his great horse Silver and mapped the tactical plan by which he finally broke the back of the British and won the war and made possible the establishment of the Republic. Why, this is one of the most historic spots in the whole United States. Pardon me while I phone Carl Van Doren."

But Ed Stanley only glanced at the horizon, and said, "Nice view," in the way that a man will say "Nice shot" in a tennis game, not meaning it at all, and then he sat down and started yammering about how well *Thomas Forty* was selling and what good reviews he got. Historical novelist, indeed! And I knew him when he couldn't tell you the date Columbus discovered America!



MR. SMITH WILL AUTOGRAPH. . . .

No author can truthfully say that he has reached the peak of success until the day comes when a large department store invites him to appear in person at an autographing party. From the time when

Smith produced a book I looked forward to that great day of recognition, and after seven long years it came—in Indianapolis.

The autographing party was scheduled for a Friday and there were ads about it in the local papers. "Come in and meet H. Allen Smith. Mr. Smith will autograph his books from 3 to 5 on the main floor."

It made me feel fairly important. At the same time I was more than a little apprehensive. I had trouble getting my car parked, and it was after three o'clock when I found myself approaching the store. I noted with satisfaction that the crowds were not yet overflowing into the street—perhaps the madness and rioting would not come until after four o'clock. I was slightly chagrined to find no evidence of police reserves. Really! These people in Indiana! Back in New York we know how to handle a situation like this! Well, they'd find out when this mob got out of hand! I began to feel uncomfortable. It was a hot day and it would be rough on me physically. I decided that promptly at five o'clock I'd lay down my pen and announce firmly that I would not sign another book for ten thousand dollars.

I hurried into the store and found the book department. No mob. No crowd. Nobody. Very likely they were holding the people behind heavy ropes back in some other department. I found my way to the manager's office.

He was very pleasant. "All ready for the grind?" he smiled. I assured him I was ready for anything. He then escorted me to a long table in the center of the book department. Several hundred copies of my books were stacked on this table. There was a chair, a desk pen, a blotter, and an ash tray.

I sat down and loosened my collar. The manager brought over his assistant and introduced her. Then he brought over some of his clerks and introduced them. After that he scanned the horizon, a worried look on his face. Finally he leaned down and said, "You know, we never can tell what will happen at these shindigs."

"Sure," I said. "I know." Just as if I had been through a thousand department store campaigns.

A couple of women came by. They looked at me and at the piles

of books. Then they looked at each other and shrugged, and moved on—probably headed for the drug department to buy rat poison to feed to their husbands

The manager was embarrassed and tried to divert me. He told me about a local woman who wrote books and who always had an autographing party after each book was published

"She insists," he said, "on signing her books with gray ink, and it has to be a particular shade of gray. We had to hold up the proceedings over an hour one day when she ran out of ink and we couldn't find the shade of gray she used. She refused to sign without it, and all the customers were getting sore."

Somehow it didn't cheer me up—especially that line about "all the customers" getting sore

"You know," he went on, "you're playing to pretty stiff competition. Spike Jones is autographing his records this afternoon over in the music department."

I fingered the fountain pen nervously, and we made little jokes about pens that write under water, as was the fashion in those remote times

Then my customer arrived

He was a young fellow, maybe twenty, and he hovered near by and watched me for a while. Then he came up and began a studious examination of the books on the table. At last he settled on an anthology which I had committed

"Tell me something," he said. "What's in this book?"

I tried to tell him,

"I read all the others," he said, "when I was in the service. This one I missed. What I wanna know is what's in it?"

I tried to tell him again

"Yeh," he said, "but what I really wanna know is do you knock women in this one too?"

"How do you mean, knock women?"

"Well," he said, "you knock women in all the others. Do you knock women in this one?"

I said that I hadn't been aware that I ever knocked women, but

Wiley added that if I knocked women in the other books, then I knocked them a bit in this one too. I didn't want to lose him.

Now the young man had a long debate with himself—whether he ought to buy this book or simply go away and forget it all. He asked for more details about its contents. To the best of my ability I began reciting from it. He argued and fussed and fumed, and he looked at it inside and out, and hefted it, and prodded it like a woman buying a head of lettuce, and finally he said with an air of foolhardiness: "I suppose I might as well buy it."

He gave his money to one of the clerks and I felt jubilant. Then he got a chair and, pulling it alongside me, opened the book to the flyleaf and said:

"Now. Before we get down to this signing business, I got a question I want to ask you. Did Betty Hutton actually climb all over you like you said in that book?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, she did."

He stared at me curiously.

"How'd you get 'er to do it?" he demanded. "How does a fella get her to climb all over you like that?"

"I don't know," I told him. "I was just sitting there, and the next thing I knew she was climbing all over me."

"Right in front of everybody?"

"Yep."

"Kee-rist!" He thought about it for a while, apparently with pleasure, then sighed and returned to the book.

"Now," he said, resuming his businesslike air, "we got to be careful what we write in here. I want you to knock women some more. Write something that's a good knock on women."

We had a fifteen-minute discussion over this point. How did he want me to knock women? He tried to explain it, but somehow it wasn't quite clear to me. Finally I had a thought.

"Is there," I asked, "any one particular woman you want me to knock?"

"Now you got it!"

**"What's her name?"**

**"Joyce "**

**"You want me to knock this Joyce?"**

**"Give it to her good!" he said grimly "Beat her brains out!"**

**So I steadied my pen and wrote in that graceful script of mine:**

**"To Bob—from one who knows that Joyce is an awful stinker. H.**

**Allen Smith "**

**He examined it and beamed**

**"That's the ticket!" he said "That'll fix 'er!"**

**Then he got up and put the book under his arm and hurried away My customer My fan I hated to see him go My watch said five o'clock I stood up in that awful void and shook hands with the manager and the clerks and drove out to my sister's house and just beat hell out of my nephew Mike in a game of cutthroat croquet.**



# MEN AT WORK





## STOOD UP

Most newspapermen get mad when, after making an appointment for an interview, they arrive on time and find they have been stood up. They go away and swear vengeance on the miscreant, such vengeance taking the form of a holy resolve never to mention the dirty dog's name in print again.

Occasionally I get stood up but I always go back a second time. A person who'll walk out on a date and leave no explanation will, as a general rule, turn out to be a wonderful subject for an interview when cornered and tied down.

Slapsie Maxie Rosenbloom stood me up, but I got him the next day in his room at the Waldorf Astoria. He was sprawled on the bed when I walked in but he got up, put on a robe and started showing his big, bare feet around the room.

He was rubbing his chin and remarking something about his willingness to make a biological barter with women—men to take over seasonal illnesses, and woman to do the whisker growing and shaving. The telephone rang.

"You can come up," said Maxie into the phone, "but you can't stay but a minute, because I'm busy. But I want to see you, so come up for a minute."

He sat down in a chair, wrapped one leg around the other and said:

"That was one of my brothers. He's a good kid. I got all kinds of sisters and brothers, and they are a burden. I wish to Jesus I didn't have. If it is not dough they are after they come to me and want me to settle up their fights. I bought my mother a house here in New York a few years ago and I give her enough dough she should take

care of the whole bunch and take the worry off my head Then my mother died, so I come East and took my father out to California. I have not seen all my sisters and brothers together for a long time, so on this trip I decided I would get them all together in one bunch and have a dinner So what do I find? I come back, and this one ain't speaking to that one, and this brother is having a fight with this sister, and it is a God-damn mes But this one—this one that's on his way up—he's a good kid '

I never did learn the brother's name He was a shy, frightened-looking fellow when he came into the room Maxie called him "son" Their handshake was perfunctory

"Come over and set down," said Maxie, "and visit a minute Then get the hell out of here, as I got business to attend to You look good How's Ethel?"

"Oh, Maxie, she's fine She's just fine You look good, too, Maxie "

Maxie stared at his brother, and the brother twisted his cap nervously in his hands, appearing to be embarrassed in the presence of this famous guy I retired behind a newspaper in a corner but I didn't miss much

"Charlie come around to see me," said Maxie "He wanted some dough I was kinda glad to hear you speaking on the phone I know that ain't what you come around for You ain't like the others "

The brother coughed and looked at the floor

"Well, Maxie," he said speaking haltingly and evading Maxie's eyes, "to be truthful, Maxie, that's what I come around for I thought maybe you could—I had a idear—well, Maxie, you know how it is—there is this bookie, and he has got me for a hundret and a half, and——"

"A bookie!" shouted Maxie "Listen, don't give me none of that You ain't that kind It's not a bookie "

"I swear to God it's a bookie, Maxie," said the brother

"How'd you ever get to owe a bookie a hundret and a half?" demanded Maxie

"Well, Maxie, you know how it is It's them long shots I just don't——"

"Long shots, my fanny," said Maxie. "You been shooting craps?"

"Well, a little, Maxie, but it's them long shots . . . It's this bookie that cause me to come around like this. You know I ain't that way, Maxie. I wouldn't do it, but——"

"Does Ethel know about this bookie?" asked Maxie.

"Sure, Maxie. Sure. Ethel knows about him. That's one of the reasons. She's scared about it. I'm not kidding you, Maxie. I wouldn't kid you."

Maxie sat in silence, wiggling his big toe and staring at it. I could tell that he was angry but I could also tell that he had a certain distant affection for this frightened brother.

"The old man"—he suddenly spoke—"he likes it out there. He's having a good time." For the first time he grinned at his brother, who came suddenly to life. His chalky face lighted up, but his burst of words was disappointing.

"The old man," he said. "He'll tell you, Maxie. He'll tell you about me. He's prob'ly already told you, hasn't he, Maxie? I was the one always helped him. I was the one helped around the house and did whatever he ast me to. I wasn't like the others, Maxie. All that scrapping around, and lazy, and all that."

"I know," said Maxie. "Sure the old man, he told me about you. He said you're okay."

"Then you'll give me some, Maxie? You'll give me some dough? So I can fix it with this bookie?"

"Sure," said Maxie. He got up and went across the room to a bureau. "Listen," he said. "You want to come to the broadcast tomorrow night?"

"What broadcast, Maxie?" asked the brother. "What broadcast you have reference to, Maxie?"

"My broadcast, you God damn dope," said Maxie. "Don't you know by this time your brother's on the air?"

"Oh, your broadcast. Oh, sure, Maxie. I listen every week. I must of misunderstood you. I never miss it. I think you're wonderful in it, Maxie."

Maxie fished around in the bureau drawer and came up with a couple of tickets. His brother accepted them but made no move to leave the room.

"About that——" he began weakly,

"The dough," said Maxie "I ain't got it right here in this room. You come to the broadcast tomorrow night, and after the broadcast I'll give you and give you a few bucks."

"A few bucks?" repeated the brother

"I'll take care of you," Maxie said, putting his big hand on the brother's shoulder. "You see me after the show. Now, get the hell out of here. This guy over here is interviewing me, and if you don't beat it I'll tell him you're a bum, and it'll be in the paper."

"Okay, Maxie," said the brother, edging toward the door. "Tomorrow night, then, after the broadcast. You won't fail me, will you, Maxie? I'll tell this——"

"Get out of here," said Maxie good-naturedly, and the brother was gone.

Maxie came back to his seat.

"That's the way it is," he said. "I would of swore on a stack of Bibles that he wasn't after dough. Sometimes I wish I was a package wrapper in a store or something. It is not only my relatives, but every man, woman and child I have ever known in my whole life since I was born down on Attorney Street."

He decided he wanted me to meet his wife. He telephoned her in some other apartment.

"Come on down here, honey," he said, "and leave me show this guy how smart you are."

She arrived a couple of minutes later—a trim, tall California girl with golden hair.

"Look at her," said Maxie proudly. "She was educated in a convent. She can talk faster than H. J. Kaltenborn, and smarter. She knows all about this war stuff and what goes on in the old country. I'll tell him what you was doing, honey, when you first met me."

"I am a child psychologist," said Mrs. Rosenbloom. "I had a group of children with subnormal mentalities. Children with a chronological age of say, sixteen and a mental age of four point five."

"Morons," said Maxie. "She give up morons for me?"

"Don't pay any attention to Maxie," urged Mrs. Rosenbloom. "He is a commercial dope. He plays dumb and gets paid for it. He is not so dumb, are you, dear?"

"Well," said Maxie, "I am not no Einstein. I'm not what you would call a brilliant person. I only got up to the three A in public school. A fellow one day ast me, he says, 'Hey, did you go to school, stupid?' And I says 'Yeah, I went to school stupid and I come out stupid.' It is a sort of gag. Whenever they ast me why I only got up to three A in school I say my old man was in four A and I didn't want to pass him."

"Tell him the story about the chicken, Maxie," suggested Mrs. Rosenbloom.

"That's not my story," protested Maxie. "That's Joe Frisco's story."

"Oh, what's the difference!" said Mrs. Rosenbloom. "Make it your own. I tell it as though it happened to you."

Maxie gazed at her with admiration.

"How ya like that?" he said. "Twenty two years of age is all she is, and when I first met her all she knew about was what you can read in books. I should steal gags from Joe Frisco!"



## VISIT WITH GARNER

We cut inland from the Rio Grande and stopped at Uvalde, on the off chance that I might get to see John Nance Garner. Inasmuch as he was approaching his eightieth birthday it didn't seem likely that he would be on public display, so I telephoned his home and a lady answered and said he wasn't there. I told her I was going to be in town for only an hour or two and wanted very much to see him and would I likely get him if I phoned again in an hour?

"He right outside the house," she said. "He right out here messin' with he pee cans. You come right on over."

We drove out Park Street and found the big house and swung in behind it and saw a man sitting on a box beside the steps leading up to the kitchen porch. It was the former Vice President. He had

two bushel baskets on the ground in front of him. He was wearing an old jacket, and the pockets were full of pecans. He would reach in and get a pecan, stare at it a few moments, then take his pocket-knife and cut one end off of it. The smaller portion of the nut would drop into one of the baskets, and then he'd drop the larger portion after it and go into his pocket for a fresh one.

He had on an old Laredo hat which was tilted back on his head, and his famous bristling white eyebrows were askew—one cocked upward, one down. He didn't look up at us as we approached, but continued cutting the ends off pecans. I introduced myself and then my wife and he nodded toward a bench and spoke for the first time.

"Set," he said. We set and watched him for a minute or two. He had a soggy cigar in his mouth, and occasionally he would drop it. It would fall into the basket, and he'd fumble around for it and come up with it and then wipe the dirt and fragments of pecan shell off it and return it to his mouth.

"Like to have a drink?" he finally suggested. "I mean whisky."

I said no, that I was driving, that I didn't like to drive while drinking, that I believed there was wisdom in the Texas highway signs which say, "When You Drink, Don't Drive—When You Drive, Don't Drink."

"I don't drive," he said, "so I drink."

He went on cutting pecans, and I asked him what he was doing with them.

"Cuttin' the tops off," he said.

"What for?"

"Like to look inside of them," he said.

"Where'd you get them?"

"Got a pecan grove. Every day I go out and walk around and pick them up off the ground till I got my pockets full. Then I come back here and set down and cut the tops off."

"What you looking for inside of them?"

"Nothin' much. Got nothin' else to do. Get tired of lookin' at the chickens. I've got some chickens. I've got some geese. Got some cows. Got some ranches. Got this big house. Eleven rooms in it."



"Who lives here with you?" my wife wanted to know.

"Nobody," he said. "Nobody but me and that old black woman in there"

Directly above his head was a screened porch, and when he mentioned "that old black woman" a low cackling laugh came from inside.

"That's her," he said "That old black woman's eavesdroppin' on us. She's a Russian spy Used to be a German spy"

The cackling laughter grew louder

"Truman was here," said the old man "Train come in at the station downtown, and they had three thousand goats on hand to meet him This is goat country They claim it's the goat capital of the world"

"Do you raise any goats?"

"Nope Never raised a goat in my life I eat some goat chops for breakfast this morning That old black woman in there cooked 'em Mexicans are the only people that eat goats Mexicans and me"

He raised his head a little and sniffed the air

"That old black woman in there, she's cookin' again," he said. "Gettin' so she cooks somethin' for me to eat most every day." More laughter from the screened porch It was apparent that the old black woman enjoys working for Garner

I noticed now that he was dressed out in a manner to prevent his losing things His watch was in his shirt pocket and the heavy gold chain led up to the buttonhole in his shirt collar and was secured there His glasses were in a soft leather case which was fastened to the other shirt pocket with a safety pin

He never once stopped slicing off the ends of pecans "Knowing him to be a wealthy man, I tried to get him to talk g about the extent of his holdings, but he brushed me off

"Anything you want to know about me," he said, "you can get out of Bascom Timmons's book I never wrote a book I was always gettin' offers from people to write one, and I got sick of it. So I says there's only one way to put a stop to this, and I got out all my papers and letters and everything and hauled 'em out in the back yard and made a bonfire outa them Then along comes Bas-

com, and he's an old friend of mine and stood a chance to make some money writin' a book about me, so I told him to go ahead. You sure you don't want a drink?"

I don't think we made much of an impression on this great Texan. As we got in the car and drove away he didn't look up from his work, and I had a feeling that we were just a couple of pecans with our ends sliced off.



## THE STORY OF 'BAD BOY'

Matty Mario is a prize fighter turned novelist, and it took me a few weeks to locate him after I first heard of his career. As it was, he turned up at my office on a Saturday afternoon, just as a poker game was getting interesting, and I had to put down my cards and listen to his story.

He lives on Staten Island, once fought under the aegis of Jack Kearns and has a nose that spreads all over his face with all the pointless enthusiasm of the trailing arbutus. I escorted him into a far corner, away from the mighty cursings of the poker game, and let him talk about himself.

He said he had just started work on his second novel, a sequel to his first book which was called *Bad Boy*.

"You mean to say you ain't read *Bad Boy* yet?" he demanded. "Holy Jesus! You should read it right away. You'll get a real kick out of it." He produced a copy of the book from an old brief case and presented it to me.

*Bad Boy* was published by the Broadway Printers & Publishing Company, of 480 Canal Street, and Jack Dempsey, quoted on the jacket, described it as "a brilliant kayo." It never reached the best seller lists, and for this poor showing Mr. Mario blamed the publishers.

"I should of took it to Doubleday and Doran or Dodd and Mead," he said, showing off his knowledge of the publishing business. "They would of been glad to get it, but I am new at the game a little and I didn't know."

## **MEN AT WORK**

Mr. Mario is thirty-five years old and no longer indulges in professional fisticuffs. Since acquiring his own typewriter he has been devoting all his efforts to literature. He said he chose fiction writing as his career while he was fighting for Kearns in California.

"I went to Doc and I told him about it," he explained. "He wanted me to keep on fighting. He wanted me to proceed to the title. But I says I wanted to write. Doc says, 'What the hell you wanna write for? Why don't you leave writin' to the writin' people?'"

"So I says to Doc, 'Doc, maybe you don't understand this, but I like to think and concentrate and then put it down in black.'"

That settled it. Mr. Mario came back to Staten Island and borrowed a typewriter from a Mr. Ed Radigan. He asked particularly that Mr. Radigan be given full public credit for the part he played in the production of *Bad Boy*.

"I typewrite my own stuff," said Mr. Mario. "I use the hunt-and-look system. I love it. I have got to have absolute quiet when I write. If the dog barks I cannot proceed on. I have got to go out and untie him and let him loose."

"When I write I see pitchers before me of the scene, just like movies. All through my first novel I see pitchers of Jimmy Cagney as the hero, Johnny Conway. It will hold you spellbound to the very end."

"I keep my hero and my heroine separated till the middle of the book. Then they come together. He does not know who she is. He does not know that she is the same little girl he used to beat up when she was a little kid. He falls in love with her but he is afraid to tell her who he is. He is fighting under the name of Johnny Kid Reed in boxing circles. He really wants to get better acquainted with this lovely girl, who is beautiful. Then he fights a bout with the semihero, who is the heroine's brother. She doesn't know who he is, only she has a vague idea from the scar where she hit him with a rock when she was a kid. You see how it works out towards a climax?"

Mr. Mario said his sequel was going to be easier to write, since it would be about the same characters and their personalities were all clearly defined in his mind.

"Right now I am up against a blank wall," he said "What comes next has got to come natural to me It is impossible for me to just sit down and make it up Sometimes at night my head actually buzzes with pains, aching for a plot I go take an ice-cold shower and let the ice water run down my spine Writing a story is just putting the right ends together and then sort of weaving them around in the middle

Mr Mario said that he was born in Greenwich Village but that he doesn't believe that circumstance had anything to do with his literary bent He is a licensed masseur and he used to work part time at the Ford plant in Edgewater

"You might put down that I am semimechanically inclined," he suggested

He feels sure that the movies will grab his first book once they get wise to it

"They can't help themselves from buying it," he assured me, "after they have read it

He flipped through the pages of *Bad Boy*, stopped at page 251 and, pitching his voice to the Gabriel Heatter level read

*There was a blank silence in the room for a full minute while mother and son stared at each other The kid's pent up longing of many years rose in his throat choking him Tears began to course unchecked down his face With a heart rending cry he ran across the room and threw himself on his knees at his mother's feet, sobbing heavily into the folds of her dress Mom Mom .. Oh, gee, Mom*

Mr Mario finished it and glanced up the sheer beauty of it rising in his throat, choking him

"Imagine Cagney in that scene!" he cried "Whatta pitcher!"



COLONEL HUBERT FAUNTILERoy JULIAN

Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy Julian brought the invitation in person to my office It was engraved in gold and urged that I attend

## **MAX AT WORK**

the "world premier semi formal" of an all-Negro photoplay called *The Notorious Elinor Lee* at the RKO Regent Theater in Harlem.

I got to the theater at seven o'clock, two hours before the time announced for the world premier semi formal. I was standing in the lobby when, at seven-fifteen, a glossy Cadillac pulled up at the curb, and out of it stepped the associate producer of the picture, Colonel Julian. He was in full dress with a shining top hat, white silk gloves and an Inverness cape which he wore as if he had live rabbits concealed in it.

He strode dramatically across the sidewalk, but no one witnessed his magnificent passage save a man hurrying northward with a wash-tub in his arms. The colonel dashed into the office of Max Mink, manager of the theater, where he loosed the silver chain of his cape and contemplated Mr. Mink and me

"Ah," he said, "the press. I would have you know that I created this clement weather for this wonderful occasion. I wagered a mere fifty to one that it would be clement. But you look nulled. Will you not partake? We have even some imported port."

He began unwrapping a large bundle and from it extracted one quart of rye, one fifth of scotch, one bottle of cognac, one bottle of imported port and two bottles of champagne. It was plain to see that the colonel's world première was going to be carried off with a flourish.

Then he gave instructions that a microphone should be set up on the sidewalk in front of the theater.

"I will have my man drive me back to my home," he said, "so I can bring the champagne glasses. My police escort will pick me up there, and we shall arrive with sirens tooting. Now, about the ice."

He looked about the room for a bucket and, finding none, seized upon a metal wastepaper basket.

"This will have to do for the champagne," he said. He summoned an usher and told him to go forth and get a large chunk of ice. Soon the usher was back, empty handed.

"The man at the candy store," he said, "told me he couldn't spare us no ice. So I told him it was for Colonel Julian and you wanted the ice to put in the wastebasket for champagne. So he

says I should come back and get the basket and bring it over and he would stuff it full of frozen custard. He said frozen custard is much better than ice to put champagne in and——”

“Parr-don meeeeee!” interrupted the colonel “Do I look like a varicose idiot? Do I? Go elsewhere and get the ice!”

The boy went away again and soon was back with a chunk of ice, which Mr Mink began chopping up with a Boy Scout ax and putting in the wastepaper basket. Then Mr Mink, unaccustomed to world premières, sighed and carried the microphone to the sidewalk. He stood on the curb and began announcing the imminent arrival of Colonel Hubert Fauntleroy Julian. And soon there was the wail of a siren. The colonel had been unable to get a motorcycle escort but swept up to the theater behind a police radio car.

This time a small crowd had collected, and the colonel was grand as he stepped from his car. He spoke a few words of greeting into the microphone, bowed, seized and kissed the hand of a woman who happened to be passing and who still probably doesn't know what went on and strode magnificently into the theater.

“*Allons messieurs!*” he cried as he reached the lobby. “This is wonderful. Really, there are two things I must learn to do. One is to smoke. The other is to take a little drink now and then.”

“Why, Colonel!” exclaimed Mr Mink. “What are your bad habits?”

The colonel rolled his eyes suggestively.

“Tut, tut, tut,” he said. “I ut, tut, tut—but TUT! One must not, really!”

By nine o'clock the theater was filled with those bearing golden invitations and those who paid forty cents or thirty cents or twenty cents at the box office. The last eight rows in the balcony were twenty cents.

I stopped in the lobby to talk with Oscar Micheaux, the actual producer of *The Notorious Elnor Lee*. He wrote, produced, directed and cut the picture, then packed it in cans and went out and sold it. The colonel had become “associate producer” simply by contributing a piece of money to the project.

Mr Micheaux said that it took ten days to shoot *The Notorious*

Elinor Lee at the old Biograph studios in the Bronx. I asked him if any of his stars ever got temperamental

"Sure," he said "Both the boys and the girls get temperamental. They get to reading these movie magazines, all about Gable and Garbo, and they start to feeling their oats That's why I make my pictures with all-star casts Everybody in my pictures is the star. If I made only one person the star there would be no holding that party with a halter "

Inside the theater the resplendent Colonel Julian mounted the stage, splattered compliments around, introduced Mr. Micheaux, announced that "time is fleeting very fast," and cried out.

"Darken the theater, and on with the show Let joy be unconfirmed!"

The lights went out, and the picture started It was not *The Notorious Elinor Lee*. It was Richard Dix in *Reno*—the top half of a double feature

We sat through this drama, and at last *The Notorious Elinor Lee* was unfolded before us. It was colossal I remember that there was a man named Stacker Lee who was tried for murder, and the star witness for the prosecution was a parrot The parrot had been an eyewitness to the crime and during the trial kept testifying, "Stacker, you done it Stacker, you stabbed him with a knife." Stacker Lee was Elinor Lee's f-a-p-a, and the way Elinor Lee got notorious was in Paducah where she was "in the low-down business before she went to St. Louis." It was very gripping and held the interest, and I laughed until I got a pain in my side

When it was over I left the theater and stopped at the gate long enough to ask the usher when *The Notorious Elinor Lee* would be shown again.

"What you mean, again?" he rejoined. "It's been showin' all day since eleven o'clock this morning This nine o'clock show was the only one that's the world's premier "



## SHERLOCK HOLMES

By taxi now to Baker Street for a look at the Sherlock Holmes exhibition. The taxi driver knew all about the exhibition but I was unable to talk to him until we arrived before the big office building which stands on the supposed site of 221b Baker Street. Once there, however, he told me that he had already been in to see the Holmes show. "Mr 'Olmes," he said, "was a very great man." Something in his manner suggested that he believed Sherlock Holmes to have been a real man rather than a character in fiction.

"Was he a real man," I asked, "or just a character made up by somebody?"

"Oh, no, Sir," said the driver " 'E was real enough—old Sherlock 'Olmes. A very great man, too. Great plain-clothes detective, 'e was. Lived in another period. Solved many famous crimes that Scotland Yard couldn't 'andle "

In the lift I fell into conversation with a small, birdlike lady who was bound for the Holmes exhibit and she assured me that her father was a personal friend of the great detective and often told stories about their association. She said this was her third visit to the exhibition—she just loved starding and looking into the room that was fitted out exactly as it had been when Holmes and Dr. Watson occupied it and when her own father visited it. Once inside she escorted me directly to the balcony from which Holmes fans view the Baker Street lodgings. She assured me that most of the furnishings in the room were the originals. After that I inspected the rows of cases containing manuscripts and letters and books—most of which seemed to indicate that a man named Conan Doyle was important to the Holmes picture, and then I talked to one of the attendants. He said that a great many visitors, people who had lived in London all their lives, believed the detective was an actual person—that Conan Doble was writing straight biography. One recent woman visitor had said she went to school with Sherlock and described the kind of person he was in his younger days;



## **MEN AT WORK**

another lady said Holmes had solved a case for her sister, but she was mysterious about the details. And just a few days back a letter had been written to *The Times* saying that Holmes and Watson had decided to come out of retirement and see the exhibition for themselves. The letter designated the hour at which they would arrive at Victoria Station and a large group of Londoners gathered at the station to welcome them, but they didn't show up

Sherlock Holmes must surely be one of the greatest creations of mortal mind—so many of his fans want to believe that he really lived and may still live. I myself have seen him, within the last year and at my home in Westchester

One afternoon I was mooning on the stone wall out by the garage when a tall old man came walking up the driveway, wearing a deer-stalker cap and carrying a couple of valises. He introduced himself as Sherlock Holmes and said Professor Moriarty was close on his trail and would I give him shelter for a brief interval? I was immensely thrilled, to be sure, and ushered him into the house and made him comfortable. He said he needed a little time to deduct some stuff and then he'd turn on that boulder Moriarty and rid the world of him forever.

This was a tremendous thing for us—sheltering the world's greatest detective right in our own home—and we waited on him hand and foot and I spent hours chasing into the village to get him all manner of things he wanted. Then after about a week I began to wonder when he'd be getting along. He'd loiter around the living room scraping on that goddam fiddle. He had a good supply of cocaine with him, and his needle, and day after day he'd lie on the couch, giving himself occasional injections of the drug, and he wouldn't let us have the television set on, and bawled the dog out whenever he barked, and complained about American cooking. He had his Persian slipper in which he kept his pipe tobacco and he insisted that the slipper stay on the floor beside the fireplace. I had to go to the ironmonger's and buy a coal scuttle, in which he kept his cigars. He had me fetch twelve different brands of American cigarettes and he'd sit around for hours smoking them a bit and then examining the ash, sniffing at it and peering at it through his

magnifying glass. He said he could already distinguish between a hundred and forty different kinds of tobacco ash, but that American cigarettes had him baffled and he was determined that he would learn the difference between them. He never did, and cursed America for it. He wouldn't permit me to play my electrified organ and he forbade our turning on the radio—arguing that such a thing as the radio didn't exist—he didn't believe in it so that made it definite. After a while he got out some trick pistols and started shooting inside the house, shooting the initials of Queen Victoria in the dining room wall and driving the dog nuts in the bargain. Not to mention my wife and me. After that he instructed me to go somewhere and get him a few hives of bees, which I did, and he fooled around with them for a couple of days and then got bored and went back on the cocaine. He'd stay up most of the night, thumping around downstairs and keeping us awake, and one night he picked up one of my books and read it and the next morning asked me if I knew the idiot who wrote it.

All of this was nerve racking, but we would have put up with it in exchange for the great honor that had come to us, but now there came fresh developments. Neighbors dropped in now and then and, by his instruction, we always introduced him as Mr. Watson, a distant relative. One evening a friend of mine arrived with his wife, and Holmes glanced at my friend and said, "I see you were in the vicinity of Lake Mahopac at three o'clock this afternoon." My friend denied it with some heat. Holmes then pointed out that the dried mud on my friend's shoes was of a type only to be found in the vicinity of Lake Mahopac, and he knew from the way the weather had been behaving that my friend was up there around three o'clock. That did it. My friend had been under suspicion for quite a while. His wife suspected that he had been calling on a redheaded divorcee up at Mahopac, but she hadn't been able to get the goods on him till now. The moment she heard Sherlock's deduction she grabbed up the nearest heavy weapon, which happened to be the coal scuttle, and walloped her husband on the head with it, scattering cigars the hell and gone all over the living room. The dog, already a nervous wreck, began to screech and then took

## **MEN AT WORK**

hold of the detective by the leg Holmes started clubbing the dog whereupon my wife and I swarmed over him, beating him with heavy ash trays My cavalier friend lay stretched on the floor, knocked cold by the blow his wife had administered, and she had flounced out of the house and disappeared Now suddenly I ceased belaboring the great detective, rushed out, hopped in the car and went in search of Professor Moriarty, eager to let him know the whereabouts of his old enemy

It was a sort of daydream and it ended there, but I think it demonstrates the realism of the Conan Doyle creation



NEW YORK





## SHOW BIZ

There is, says the song, no business like show business. Let's all shake hands with our neighbor on the left and agree that the statement is correct. It is, however, open to widely divergent interpretations. When he wrote his song Mr. Irving Berlin appears to have been saying that show business is a punctilious and inspirational branch of human striving. It is clearly implied that if the noblest of all King Arthur's knights were alive today he'd be chewing scenery on a Broadway stage, or whinnying into a night club microphone, or playing guessing games before the television cameras. Yet there is another school of thought which holds that there is, in truth, no business like show business because, in every one of its several divisions—the movies, the stage, radio, television, the circus, the opera, the cabarets—there is a greater proportion of immature and unalloyed bastards than in any other field on earth, with the possible exception of politics.

This second school of thought argues that the common coin of show business is an amalgam of malicious gossip, backbiting, hypocrisy, cheap and maudlin sentiment, addiction to religious quackery, lying, conniving, cheating, intellectual numbness, and classic depravity.

Such an indictment seems farfetched. If it's true that there's a broken heart for every light on Broadway, it's probably also true that there's a broken heart for every ball bearing in Detroit. The difficulty in show business is that you are dealing with actors, and an actor who is at heart a scurvy villain can go along for years fooling even his close friends into believing he is a kindly soul with humanitarian instincts—the best of all possible fellows. Anyone

**Who attempts to write about people in the entertainment world is therefore usually treading uncertain ground. All he can say for sure is that—there's no business like show business.**



## **PEOPLE FROM PEORIA**

Ben is from Peoria One of the strange things about New York is that the town fairly teems with people who originated in Peoria. They say "I'm from Peoria!" with a bellicose glint in the eye, and it is their custom if you laugh to spread a handkerchief on the floor, place their feet on it, fling up their dukes and offer you a dollar, six bits if you can knock them off it



## **COPS AND FIREMEN**

Criminal instincts have always dominated my inner life and for this reason I've never regarded a cop as being quite human The man sitting next to me in the plane was a New York City patrolman He was not in uniform but wore a costume which made him look like a major league umpire We had a long conversation during the flight, and I found out that he was human He hates New York City firemen, and he told me that all cops hate all firemen

"Them firemen," he said, "are crooked as a dog's hind leg. They'd steal off their grandmothers They go to a fire and wear these big hip boots that are wide at the top I'd like to see the day come when the Federals would catch a bunch of firemen coming out of a store where there's been a fire If you turned them upside down and shook them, half the merchandise in that store would fall out of their boots I don't see why they don't let cops have boots like that Them dirty firemen got it all over us, wearing their boots. A cop's gotta carry enough junk around in his pockets without finding a place to put loot. It's not fair "

He told me that firemen are so dishonest they even tell lies to their wives He said the classic story in the New York fire depart-



## NEW YORK

ment concerned a young fireman who was accustomed to reach his home on payday with maybe half his pay left. This fireman had not been married long, and he had convinced his wife that he, as well as all other firemen, were paid by piecework. He told her that members of each company got paid so much per fire, and to cover up his fortnightly deficit he'd sit around and complain about how slow business was.

One day this fireman's wife met the wife of another fireman, who worked at another company.

"How's business been lately over at your husband's place?" asked the deceived one. In no time at all she learned of the fraud that had been put upon her. According to my cop friend, she went straight to the station and asked the man on post at the door if her husband were in. The man on post yelled, and the double-dealer came down the brass pole. At the same instant his feet hit the floor his wife hit him—square in the teeth.



## INCIDENT ON BROADWAY

A press agent of my acquaintance came busting out of the crowd.

"My God!" he cried. "A gods. d!"

He seized me by the arm and dragged me up to the Capitol, explaining breathlessly that Miss Vivien Leigh had just stepped up to the box-office window to buy a ticket for the purpose of seeing herself act in a picture called *Waterloo Bridge*.

Quite by accident, he went on, he happened to be in the lobby, and, also by accident, two publicity men from M-G-M were there and a press agent from Loew's and an M-G-M photographer. The circumstance of a working newspaperman's arrival on the scene was a pure work of the gods.

Miss Leigh was posing prettily at the box office. The press agent shoved me into her face.

"Miss Leigh," he said, "this is Mr. Smith."

"How do you do?" she said

"How do you do?" I said

Then I faded back while someone grabbed her and hustled her into the lobby I tailed along with the crowd, and they had Miss Leigh posing before a poster of herself, when one of the M-G-M men grabbed me, pranced me up to her and said

"Miss Leigh, meet Mr Smith"

"How do you do?"

"How do you do?"

Again I faded back They grabbed her (she is no bigger than a fifth of scotch) and shoved her into an inner lobby and posed her for another picture Ropes were strung around to keep the rabble back I stood behind the ropes and watched and listened to the comment of the people Most of them were asking the same question "Who is it? Who is she?"

Then the man from Loew's spotted me

"Hey!" he yelled, racing across the thick carpet and dragging me beneath the rope In a moment I was again face to face with the little actress

"Miss Leigh," said the man from Loew's, 'I want you to meet Mr Smith'

"How do you do?" she said

"How do you do?" I was enjoying it by now, but she showed signs of strain beneath this awful, unceasing assault of Smiths

On the next jump they got her inside the theater—into the corridor back of the orchestra section—and at this point Mr Bernard Sobel of M-G-M flung himself into action He grabbed my arm and, letting out little yips, trotted me alongside Miss Leigh

"Vivien dear," he said, 'here is Mr Smith He wants to talk to you'

"Oh, how do you do?" said Miss Leigh For the first time I noticed a small, dark man at her side She introduced him to me as Mr Olivier

Mr Sobel had me in a spot He had said I wanted to talk to her. I didn't particularly I had nothing to talk to her about

"Have you seen this picture?" I asked, nodding toward the screen

## NEW YORK

"No," whispered Miss Leigh.

I turned to Mr. Olivier. "Have you seen it?"

"No."

"Are you going to see it now?"

"Oh no," said Miss Leigh. "We haven't time. We have to get back to the theater." Then her nose crinkled, and she looked furtively about the corridor.

"Do you know some way of getting out of here?" she whispered.

I turned around, and there at my elbow was an exit door giving on Fifty first Street. I nodded toward it. She grinned and winked, and in a moment she and Mr. Olivier were gone.

I walked back through the lobby and found Fiftieth Street again. I was heading for the subway entrance, when I felt a tug at my arm. I turned and found a little old man hopping along beside me.

"Excuse me," he said when I had stopped. "Excuse me, young man, I happen to be from Kendallville, Indiana. Could you tell me where I could get a job as a free lance photographer?"



## HONOR AMONG SPORTSMEN

Thad Banner had invited a dozen of New York's leading sportsmen to be his guests at a stag dinner. The old man had chosen his guests with care. Each of the twelve was prominent, a gentleman by the standards of the time, each had money and each was known to relish the pleasures of the flesh. Thad stipulated that the guests must come in evening clothes. The twelve prominent sportsmen of Manhattan were a mite bewildered when they walked into the dining room and found their places at the long table. There was an empty chair on either side of each man, and at the head of the table sat the host. He arose and addressed them.

"Gentlemen, you are no doubt wondering why there are vacant places beside you. You won't be wondering long. There are to be ladies. But before they come in I want to extract a solemn oath from each of you. You are my friends and my guests, and I chose you because I know that each and every one of you is an honorable man. I insist that you take this oath before the festivities begin."

He surveyed the table, and that deep chuckle rumbled over the room. He picked up a glass of wine

"All stand up," he ordered, and they complied "Now I want you to pledge me, and bind the pledge with this wine, that not one of you will lay a hand on any of these ladies tonight I ask you to take oath as true sportsmen that you will not so much as touch a female tonight If any man among you hesitates to take such an oath, let him leave now And if any man who stays violates his oath, I want him to know that he will never again be welcome in my home, and I insist that the others bar him from their homes and from their friendship Is it agreed?"

Each and every one of the guests swore solemnly to abide by the regulations, and each and every one had a look of sheer puzzlement on his face Then Thad stepped to one side of the room where Eric had been standing and opened a door, and in walked twelve beautiful girls, twelve splendid and ravishing ladies rendered more splendid and more ravishing by the fact that they wore nothing but slippers

They were gay and charming and talkative as they took their places between the men, and the men, once over the first shock, began grumbling and casting evil looks at the beaming Thad

As hard as it was, each man adhered to the community pledge and made herculean efforts to engage in casual conversation with the ladies, who in turn behaved themselves as though they were enveloped in hoop skirts At length the torture of eating dinner had been got through and Willy Bodfish came in bearing an immense champagne bottle Again Thad Banner stood up

"Gentlemen," he said, "I want to congratulate you on your sportsmanship Your restraint has been truly magnificent You have proved yourselves to be the true gentlemen I believed you to be when I invited you I am so pleased with your behavior that I am going to relax the rules" A buzz and a stir around the table "Just a minute, now! You are still under oath Willy, pour the champagne For the gentlemen only"

Willy quickly circled the table, pouring from the big bottle And again Thad called upon the men to stand erect

## **NEW YORK**

"We will first drink a toast to these beautiful ladies," said the old man. "Then we sit down, and after we are seated I'll give a signal. That signal means that the rules are called off for a period of only fifteen minutes. You are relieved of your pledge for just fifteen minutes, understand?" Shouts of eager approval from around the table. "And at the end of that fifteen minutes," Thad ordered, "every man is to be back in his place, and no man is to touch one of the ladies again. Is that clear?" It was clear. "Now," said Thad, lifting his glass, "drink 'er down! Bottoms up! To the ladies!"

Each man tilted his glass and let its contents pour down his throat. In each glass was a Mickey Finn.



## **THE RETURN OF TEDDY**

I attended my first séance soon after I arrived in New York, back in 1829. The medium was a Negro woman, and after she had brought back sundry kinsfolk for the customers, she came through with a horse. No question about it. A man in the audience spoke up and said that he'd like to communicate with a dear horse he once owned—a horse named Edna. Within thirty seconds there was a heavy clumping about the dark room and then the man who had asked for Edna let out a sharp cry. Edna had given him an affectionate kick on the shin.

For a couple of years after that I almost lived at séances, always attending them in the company of Joseph Dunninger. Dunninger is the man who offers a fortune in cash to any spiritualistic medium he cannot expose or debunk. Dunninger was for years one of the leading American magicians, and I always liked him because he never pulled a half dollar out of my nose. I have a nose that is large enough to hold perhaps \$6.50 in half dollars and I have known other magicians who have embarrassed me in public by reaching up and pulling large objects out of it, including hard-boiled eggs. Dunninger never pesters his friends with such stuff.

One of the chief ghost conjurers of that period in New York was a little Italian named Nino Pecararo. He's the one who brought

back Otto H. Kahn in Italian dialect All his spirits, in fact, spoke in dialect Dunninger and I attended a number of Pecararo's spooky shows. The Italian boy enjoyed a large following because, some years earlier, he had helped convince Sir Arthur Conan Doyle that spiritualism is true

We were in the elegant apartment of a spiritualistic architect one evening and Nino, concealed in his cabinet, was fetching back spirits as fast as he could talk It was a lively show, and when it was over, I found myself standing against a wall between two middle-aged women Believers One of these women turned to me and said:

"Wasn't it simply miraculous!"

"No," I said

Both women came at me then, demanding to know what I meant

"Well," I said, "I'd never be convinced unless I could be inside that cabinet with him during one of his seances"

It was a foolish thing to say Before I knew what was going on, another seance had been scheduled for a week later and Nino had agreed that I could enter the cabinet with him I tried to withdraw, but those women demanded that I go through with the bargain, since I was such a smart aleck, and Dunninger egged me on

The special seance was held in the office of a Broadway lawyer and Nino was quietly sullen when he arrived that night A goodly crowd was there, including a noted orchestra leader and a society woman with a high pitched chest Nino's wrists and ankles were bound and his body was placed in a sack of heavy black netting. Then he was tied securely to a straight backed chair and placed in the cabinet Next they tied me to a chair and settled me alongside Nino, perhaps two feet away from him The lights were doused, the people in the audience formed themselves into a semicircle in front of the cabinet, and the seance began

Nino and I sat in the darkest darkness I have ever known and faced a heavy black curtain which separated us from the audience. The people outside made not a sound, and Nino scarcely moved a muscle for thirty minutes During those thirty minutes my small supply of courage began to ebb I started thinking as follows.

"This bastard is crazy. He's crazy and he's mad as hell at me for presuming to get into this cabinet with him. He's even crazy enough to kill me. I know he's able to wiggle himself out of those ropes and out of that sack. He's so mad, so crazy, that he's going to get loose and pick up that chair and brain me with it."

My thoughts raced along like that and I started to sweat. Still no sound from Nino—no audible indication that he was escaping his bonds. Then, without warning, he let go with one of the most piercing shrieks ever heard on earth. It was enough to frighten a fence post. Coming as it did after that long, awful, black silence, the shriek even scared the members of the audience out front. And me—I was too weak and limp to shudder. All the strength drained out of me and my body, at that moment, didn't possess enough energy to have put forth a pimple. I just sat there and waited for him to strike, figuring myself as a sure thing for the Great Beyond. He let half a minute go by after the shriek, then he spoke.

"That was Theodore Roosevelt."

I didn't believe in spiritualism then, and I don't now, but if that was Theodore Roosevelt, a pox on him. What a thing to do!

For a while I debated the advisability of getting the hell out of that cabinet, but then I thought of the embarrassment of facing the people outside and resolved to stay a bit longer. What followed was another long period of silence. I could hear Nino squirming a bit now and then. This time he'd get me. This time it would be the chair on my head. Those were the longest minutes of my life—about forty of them—and at last it came again. Another shriek, worse than the first. I leaped a foot and a half off the floor, chair and all. Then came Nino's voice again.

"That was King of Italia."

And that was enough for me. They hadn't tied me securely and I managed to get the ropes off. I didn't care any more about the shame of it. I simply got up and parted the curtains and got out of that damned place, away from Theodore Roosevelt and the King of Italia. The people outside understood and were silently sympathetic, and nobody chided me for leaving the cabinet. I simply took a place at the rear and stood there trying to think up a foolproof

murder plan, a way of killing that devil Nino without getting caught.

The spirits that came after that were much less noisy and seemed, in fact, to have a certain jubilation in their voices. Nino began bringing back dead grandmothers and uncles and cousins and the like. My departure from the cabinet had turned him into a spiritualistic ball of fire. Then Ed Wolf, the radio producer, spoke up and asked if he might have Napoleon Bonaparte on the line. There was a groaning and grunting inside the cabinet and suddenly Nino came plunging through the curtains, carrying them with him. He was free of the chair but still in the net, and he began threshing about on the floor. He had kicked the legs off two chairs before someone got the lights switched on. Half-a-dozen men piled on top of the writhing medium and someone got a bucket of cold water and poured it on him. Then he quieted down and they cut the net and ropes off him. Soon he opened his eyes, looked all around, and muttered:

"Whatta happen?"

By good fortune I didn't have a club in my hand, or I'd have then and there put him into the deepest of all trances.

The spiritualists said that my adventure in the cabinet disproved nothing. They contended that Teddy Roosevelt and the King of Italy actually had come back. I was in no mood to argue with them. I went home.

Subsequently Nino Pecararo confessed himself a fraud. Dunninger got him to sign a confession in which he admitted that he was nothing more than an escape artist, able to extricate himself from bonds.



ME AND J.P.

There ought to be some sort of a code to govern haphazard encounters with famous people, especially in New York, where you are always bumping into two-column faces. I have in mind the day I met J. P. Morgan. It was a spring morning, and I was walking up



Park Avenue. At Fiftieth Street I crossed over when the avenue traffic halted. I was walking in front of a line of cars which were pointed downtown, when I saw the head of the head of the House of Morgan. He was sitting beside his chauffeur in an open car and he was smoking a huge pipe with a lid over the bowl.

I had never seen J. P. Morgan before and as I walked in front of his car I stared brazenly into his face. He stared back at me, and his head turned slowly as he followed my progress. I thought for a moment that he probably suspected me of being an anarchist or a New Dealer and was watching me carefully lest I whip out a bomb and let him have it.

Then I thought of something else I said to myself: Here I am, staring at J. P. Morgan, and here is J. P. Morgan, staring at me. A great moment. History being made. Yet I am helpless in the grip of history, unable to think of anything to say or do. If, I reflected, I told people about this fortuitous encounter it would simply be: "I saw J. P. Morgan today." That wouldn't be anything to brag about.

I tripped over the curb as I reached the sidewalk but I didn't take my eyes from his face, and he was still glaring at me above that tobacco pot. Then I stopped, and as the Morgan chauffeur tugged at the gear-shift lever I smiled and raised my hand in a clumsy wave and cried out:

"Hiya, toots!"

He didn't respond, save to jerk his head around and stare straight ahead as his car moved off. The episode was over. I had called J. P. Morgan "toots" to his face, but that's not much to brag about either. For all I know, Thomas Lamont may call him "toots" every day of his life.



## CAB DRIVERS

Newspaper writers have been responsible for this ridiculous myth about hackies. In my own days as a newspaperman I helped the myth along. Every time I got into a cab I prepared myself for

pleasurable, retellable, printable talk. And if it didn't start coming in the first minute, I would inaugurate it myself—start asking questions. Thinking back, I can remember a long series of cab drivers who gave me nothing but grunts and growls in return. On rare occasions there would be a blabber mouth, spouting opinions about cops, women, drunks, City Hall, the government. I can only remember one driver in recent years who was even slightly amusing. On a bitterly cold day I got off a train at Grand Central and took his cab. Out of habit I started the conversation by asking him if the temperature had reached zero.

"One minute," he said. Steering with his right hand, he poked his left out the window, held up his index finger for a moment, then yelled back at me. "Nope. Not yet." He made a turn into Fifth Avenue and then called out. "They's another sure way to find out if it's down to zero. When she hits zero, then you won't see no cops in sight. Get it?" I said I got it. "Tell you something you didn't know," he went on. "In New York City there is exactly one good cop." He waited for me to ask the identity of the one good cop. I asked it. "He's in Cavalry Cemetery."

This one continued talking until we reached my destination and by that time I had him figured. All his conversation had been as set as the routine of a Broadway comedian. He had rehearsed his lines, and tested them, and polished them, and now he was a rolling philosopher, a wit, his customers would enjoy his monologue and tip him well, and someday he might even write a book.

It is my contention that there are as many dullards and dim-wits among New York cab drivers as there are among prize fighters, or waiter captains, or pickpockets, or dishwashers, or book reviewers. Maybe even more.



## COVERING THE TRAIL

Let us consider a case in which lack of thought, or imperfect thinking, led to serious trouble. This one involves a newspaperman who was married and lived in Greenwich Village. He got along well

with his wife except during those moments when an insane sort of jealousy had possession of her.

This man, later to become a well-known author, had his eye on a beautiful girl who checked hats in a Village restaurant, and the hat-check girl was not ill-disposed toward him. Came the time when the wife got word that her mother was seriously ill in the Midwest and her presence was required at the bedside.

When it developed that she would be gone a month or two, the hat-check girl moved a few of her things into the apartment for a brief period of living in sin.

One morning our man arrived at his newspaper desk and remarked to his closest friend that his wife would be home that night.

"You got that dame out all right?" asked the friend.

"Oh, sure. She moved out first thing this morning."

"Did you give the apartment a good cleaning?"

"Oh, we straightened things around."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the friend. "You don't know anything about wives. Don't you realize that there are a thousand little traces of that hat-check girl in your apartment? And don't you realize that, to another woman, every one of those traces stands out like a sore thumb? Your wife won't be back in the apartment five minutes before she'll know a dame has been shacking up with you."

The erring husband broke into a sweat. What could he do? At length the two men decided they would knock off work early and give that apartment a thorough going-over. They covered every inch of it, went into every closet and every cranny, and when they had finished there were no strange underpants hanging in the closets, no bobby pins beneath the cushions of the divan, no cigarette butts with red ends, no wisps of red hair clinging to the furniture. They finished by frying a skilletful of onions just to make sure no strange feminine odor remained.

The faithful friend departed, and soon the wife was back. She poked and pried around a bit but found nothing to arouse her suspicions. The fact that the apartment had been given a vigorous cleaning should have been a major clue, but she missed it, and she seemed altogether satisfied with things.

The following day she telephoned her husband at his office and told him, rather sharply, to come right home—that she had something important to take up with him. Her manner on the phone seemed to suggest that she had, in spite of everything, found evidence that he had been untrue. He consulted with his co-conspirator.

"Don't worry," said his friend. "We didn't miss a thing. It's something else she's got on her mind."

So he hurried to the apartment and when he walked in she was standing in the living room, a grim look on her face.

"Come in here," she growled, indicating the dining room, and he followed her, and there, in the middle of the dining room floor, was a newspaper, and onto the newspaper she had dumped the contents of the vacuum-cleaner bag—hairpins, telltale cigarette butts, red hair.

He stared at the little pile and tried to think, and then the first blow fell. His wife quietly removed a heavy piece of costume jewelry from around her neck—a necklace fashioned of Mexican silver and weighing in the vicinity of four pounds. She walloped him across the face and head with it and continued to wallop him until he was all but unconscious. He remarked afterward that Mexican jewelry makes an effective weapon—it slashes the skin without permanent disablement. I throw in this last observation as a gift to female readers—a household hint that came out of a tragic occurrence. Actually, two household hints are involved. First, to cure a husband of hat check girls, hit him with jewelry made of Mexican silver. Second, to remove bloodstains from Mexican silver, rub it with a mixture of cigar ashes and toothpaste.



## HANDLING FILIPINIDA

A publicity release came to my office one day from Warner Brothers announcing that Miss Ethelreda Leopold had been voted winner of a popularity contest among the 109 Busby Berkeley girls in Hollywood, that she was twenty-one years old, weighing 114 and

**NEW YORK**

standing five feet five, and that she was presently engaged on a tour of the nation

The handout mentioned in an offhand manner that Miss Leopold's charms might be seen in a film called *Gold Diggers in Paris*. It added that she had never been in New York before "and she says she just loves it." This much was a fib per se, because the handout reached my office a week before she got to New York. How could she say she just loves it in New York a week before she got to New York? And how could I believe the other things—such as her bodily dimensions?

On the way to the Hotel Warwick I stopped off in a five-and-ten and bought a tape measure—a ribbon in a little red case which winds itself up when you push a button. When I walked into the Leopold suite Ethelreda was indulging in luncheon with her mother, Mrs. Gertrude Ethel Leopold, and Mr. Art Donegan, of Warner's.

I had never taken the measurements of a human being before and, not knowing what the project might involve, I deemed it advisable to ask Mrs. Leopold's permission before experimenting on her stunning daughter.

"Why," said Mrs. Leopold, "I think that's a cute idea. You just go right ahead."

I took a deep breath and led Ethelreda from the luncheon table to a window overlooking Sixth Avenue. Mr. Donegan stood by with a pad and pencil, to take it all down, just like when you are being fitted for a pair of pants.

Miss Leopold removed her blue jacket and said, "All right. Go ahead."

"Where?" I asked.

She didn't answer at once—just stood there in all her glory.

"Where does one start?" I demanded.

"The shoulders," she said. "At least, I think it should be the shoulders."

I measured the shoulders and called out in a professional manner, "Shoulders, even forty."

"Now what?"

"Better get the neck," said Ethelreda. "The neck should have come first anyway"

Even twelve for the neck

"Now, bust," said Ethelreda very impersonally

"Where is that?" I asked, suspecting the worst She showed me. Suspicions verified

"Bust," I called out to Mr Donegan "Bust is—uh—wait a minute, it slipped Bust is——"

"Make up your mind," said Mr Donegan Bust was  $34\frac{1}{4}$ , but mere digits with fractions attached could never tell the story

"Waist is next," said Ethelreda Waist was  $25\frac{1}{4}$ , and extreme nervousness was taking possession of me Ethelreda gave me a peculiar look and said

"Now—hips"

I stared out the window, across the roof of the Ziegfeld Theater. Lost in thought Or lost anyway

"Get the hips" she said again

"Where?"

"Here," she said, patting

"My God, woman!" I said "Don't be so callous about it" She smiled, and I bent to the task It was a time to try a man's soul But there was nothing to do but proceed with it I got the tape measure around it all right but dropped the end with the little red case on it and then had trouble picking it off the floor, and my other hand slipped in a way that would have justified her knocking me down, and in addition to everything else Mr Donegan was sitting there laughing

"Hips" I finally muttered, "four hundred and thirty two I mean hips—hips are twenty four Made in U S A Hips"

"All right, hips!" snorted Mr Donegan "Give us hips"

I turned on him angrily

"Damn it I scarcely know the girl!"

"Pull it a little tighter" said Ethelreda "Maybe take an inch off"

It is humiliating to have to confess it, but Mr Donegan finally had to come over and read the tape Later I looked at the pad, and it said "Hips  $35\frac{3}{4}$ "

What followed was a colossal anticlimax: calf, twelve; ankle,  $6\frac{1}{8}$ . It was a relief to return to the other side of the room where Mrs. Leopold had been talking on the telephone to a Miss Bowman. She hung up just as I dropped into a chair

"Now," she said, "we can take those measurements"

"Didn't you see?" I asked "Weren't you even looking when I did it? My goodness!"

"You did it already!" she exclaimed "My, that was quick!" She picked up Mr. Donegan's pad "Hmm m m-m," she said "Bust, thirty four and one quarter That could be better"

"Yes," agreed Ethelreda "The bust could be better"

"Better in—uh—what way?" I asked quite timidly "You mean —"

"Bigger," said Ethelreda "Come on, let's measure it again, and this time I'll take a deep breath"

I begged off further measuring and devoted the remainder of my visit to the consumption of a glass of spirits. When I got back to my office I found that inadvertently I had picked up an important document while in the Leopold apartment. It was a four-page manual of instruction on how Miss Leopold should be exploited during her tour of the principal cities of the United States.

"Everything," said the manual "in connection with her visit should be conducted with royal pomp and ceremony. She should make at least one appearance in each of the leading cafés for her meals, each entrance being made with striking effect"

The document said that Miss Leopold should visit the leading bakery, the leading milk company and similar plants, "the idea being that she drinks milk, eats bread, etc., to retain her beauty and without fear of losing her figure"

In every town, the instructions went on, there is an amateur horticulturist whose garden is his pride and joy. "Have him name a rose or some other flower he has developed the 'Ethelreda' in honor of Miss Leopold"

"Soon after her arrival," the document continued, "she might demand police protection, declaring she fears an unwelcome suitor who has followed her from Hollywood"

"During her stay she loses the solid gold statuette of the Venus

de Milo which the Berkeley girls gave her as a trophy. She offers a large reward, but the statuette is not recovered

"Place a cutout (like a stencil) of the profile figure of Miss Leopold in the theater lobby so local women can stand in it to compare their measurements with hers

"Make a tie-up with a local commission house to drive a truck, apparently full of oranges, to the hotel, where it remains parked during her stay She drinks a gallon of orange juice daily, declaring that it is one of her secrets in retaining her beauty A shortage of oranges, which throws her into a state of near-collapse, would bring a new twist to the newspaper story

"The city arranges to rope off a small section in a downtown park where she can go and sun-bathe every morning at ten o'clock She could sun bathe on the hotel roof but declares real benefits can come only when you lie on fresh, green, health giving grass "

That's enough of it The people at Warner's were quite upset because I printed it and gave away trade secrets But I explained to them that I was not really in my right mind—that all the time I was copying it I kept mumbling

"Bust, thirty four and one quarter Make it thirty five!"



## BIG JOHN

Not long ago I had a guest from Indiana There were several places I wanted to take him For one thing I wanted him to see the gents' room at the Radio City Music Hall Here is one of the most noble prospects in the Western Hemisphere It is, beyond doubt, the biggest and most magnificent can on earth—a veritable Taj Mahal of toilets Looking at it for the first time a man's credulity is put to test It is almost too purty to use



## REVOLT OF A YOKEL

One of my favorite taxicab stories concerns a businessman from the Middle West who arrived one day at Grand Central Terminal,



## NEW YORK

He had a room reserved at the Hotel Roosevelt which adjoins the station. All he had to do was walk from his train, through an underpass, and up a flight of steps into the Roosevelt's lobby. Instead of that he went to the street and got into a cab.

"Hotel Roosevelt," he said, trying to make it sound city like.

The driver hesitated a moment. The Hotel Roosevelt was just a few steps away. Well, he decided, if he had trapped a yokel, he had trapped a yokel. He lit out for Brooklyn. He drove all over that borough, worked his way into Queens County, crossed the White-stone Bridge into the Bronx, and rambled around there for half an hour. Not a word from the man in the back seat.

At last the cab came down into Manhattan and pulled up at the entrance to the Roosevelt.

"How much?" said the passenger.

"That'll be twenty six dollars and forty cents," said the driver.

"Oh no you don't!" exclaimed the visitor. "You think you've got a country boy on the string but you haven't. Listen, brother, you don't get any twenty six dollars and forty cents outa me. The last time it was only eighteen dollars and twenty five cents and that's every penny you get!"



## NO CONFES

A bookmaker I once patronized drove one of those little white bungalow ice cream trucks and wore a white uniform. The jingling of his bells as he came down the boulevard was the signal for horse players to pop in view from houses as well as stores and saloons, money for their wagers in hand. Whenever happy and smiling little children approached with their nickels, the bookie would drive them off, threatening them with bodily harm if they didn't scam.



HOLLYWOOD





## HISTORY

In studying the history of Hollywood and southern California I jotted down occasional notes. My own history of the place is inclined to be fragmentary because I don't have the space to include everything. However, I have tried to do a conscientious job, and I have no doubt my treatment will be recommended for use in schools and colleges throughout the land. Now, let us have done with frivolity. Knowledge, said the philosopher, consists chiefly of knowing things. Let us know things.



## THE THUNDER OF DESTINY

or

## WHICH WAY IS GOW!FR STREET?

The Santa Monica Mountains were not always there. The ground, got restless a long time ago and started bulging around and up they came, providing pleasant hilltops for people such as Edgar Bergen, Greta Garbo, and Charles Boyer to have houses on.

In those ancient times there were no people in the valley, but imperial elephants, standing fifteen feet at the shoulder, the biggest elephants on record. Also there were swarms of saber-toothed tigers. These beasts have always had an evil reputation and may have been created to provide literary people with a useful simile, to wit: As ferocious as a saber-toothed tiger. The fact seems to be, however, that they would not bother trying to bite you. They had mean-looking upper canines that curved downward, lapping over their lower jaw even when they had their mouths open as wide as they

could get them open. Those teeth were so long that their owners couldn't bite anything. Given a juicy piece of meat, they were unable to get their mouth to it unless, like Jim Moran, they were equipped with the peculiar ability to eat a tomato through a tennis racket. Perhaps the tiger could lie down, flatten the side of his mouth against the piece of meat and drag it in back of the saber teeth. Otherwise he was in a bad fix, and those long teeth were of no use to him except perhaps for loosening the earth around tomato plants.

Came the Indians. These were of the Cahuenga tribe and their language was called Kokomcar. Most of my information about the Indians comes from a translation of their own histories. I didn't translate it myself. Dr. Rockwell, the only person east of the Rockies conversant with Kokomcar, did the job for me.

The Indians never wore any clothes. The girls went naked except for lovely earrings made out of abalone shells. They might as well not have worn them. They shampooed their hair with clay to make it look nice.

These original citizens of Hollywood lived in thatched huts something on the order of wigwams. They were lousy housekeepers. When the house got overrun by vermin and began to smell like a twenty-hole privy, they didn't bother about cleaning it out. They simply burned it down and built another.

They ate badgers, skunks, gophers, rats, and crows, and had roasted locusts for dessert. They were a peace-loving people and didn't believe in killing anybody, except one another. Thievery was unknown among them if we are to believe the Rockwell translation, which I don't.

If a wife were caught in the act of infidelity, her husband could do one of two things. He could take a club and beat her brains out, or he could go have a look at the wife of the guy who wronged him. If he liked the interloper's wife he could have her, while the other fellow could keep the unfaithful woman and welcome to her.

Immediately after the birth of a child, mother and baby were taken to the tribal hospital, called the sweat house. This was a sod-lined hut where water was poured over hot rocks. The mother and

the child were required to take up residence in the sweat house. When they had perspired themselves dry as a corn cob, they were wrapped in heavy furs so they could really sweat. The treatment had to be taken twice daily for three days. This is probably where birth control originated.

The mother was not allowed to share her husband's bed until the child was able to run. Dr. Rockwell informs me that a tribal literary classic, *Tzordinn Guggle Ze Bell Tolls*, is concerned with the dilemma of a husband under this taboo. This husband became the parent of a *ggukk* (a tribal word meaning moron, or average person) and while the *ggukk* appeared to be physically normal, he was incapable of running even at the age of eighteen. His father waited eighteen years and then crept up to the *ggukk* and started beating him on the head with a sockful of lemon seeds. The sock split at the seams and the seeds were scattered over the ground. Hence the lemon industry. I do not consider this tale to be adequate from a literary point of view because it never does get around to telling whether that *ggukk* ever ran a step. That, to me, is more important than lemons. Think of his old man.

The first Hollywood residents, these Cahuenga Indians, had all manner of cures for their afflictions and they had all manner of afflictions. They would take harcoal made from wild cucumbers and rub it on the head to cure baldness. For a pain in the side they applied a wet poultice of live red ants. If they were just generally sick, they were given a rattle to shake.

They had a Jimson-weed ceremony that was quite nice. It was for boys stricken with puberty. These boys would be herded together in the place of assembly. The priest would mix up a large bowl of Jimson weed soup, which is said to be stronger than vodka. Each of the boys was required to drink some of the stuff. When they had all been given their share, the men would finish it off. Everybody then got up and began dancing around and making bird noises until they fell down and passed out. The rite is no longer practiced in the Cahuenga Valley—for little boys.

Now come the Spaniards. They went up and down the land establishing missions. They were having wars all the time and some

of the wars were fought right where Hollywood stands today. The battles were heroic. A typical engagement, the battle of Cahuenga Pass, was fought in 1845. The Mexican governor, Micheltorena, heard that a revolt was brewing in the Southland. He came marching down the coast with his army. The rebels moved up from San Diego and were joined by the total population of El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciuncula (now L. A.). The rebel horde went out to meet the Governor's troops and did so at Cahuenga Pass. The historic site is now marked by an establishment serving ice-cream sodas made out of carrots, or spinach, or the juice of water cress. The artillery duel lasted for two long days and nights. Wives and children of the rebels stood on the hilltops and wept and wrung their hands as the guns boomed.

At the start of the third day of carnage Governor Micheltorena checked his casualties. They were:

Horses killed—1.

Mules wounded—1.

Micheltorena decided against further wanton sacrifice and capitulated. Thus ended Mexican rule in California. I think.



## FORM-FITTING

Somewhere I heard about an institution in Hollywood specializing in "custom-made uplift form-fitting brassières." I already knew that stuffing bubby socks is more common in Hollywood today than stuffing turkeys. I suspect that most girls there are militantly modest about where gents shall put their hands solely because the gents would quickly determine that mountains had been made out of molehills. A studio still photographer told me about a session with a glamorous actress. He wanted to get her in a series of sexy poses. She arrived for the sitting in a form-fitting gown, but the way he wanted to pose her, the bust was altogether inadequate. She was in a hurry to get away and had no time to go back for the reinforcements usually employed in such cases. The cameraman poked



around his studio and found an old pair of nylon stockings. These were crammed in the proper vacancies and patted around until the required effect had been achieved. The photograph that resulted became extremely popular with the armed forces and was pinned up by the boys in far-off jungles and on shell torn beachheads, causing many a lonely warrior to sit down and quietly bite tent stakes in half.

Here was a field I wanted to investigate, but I'm handicapped. I couldn't very well go to that brassière store and ask for a fitting, and I was inclined to be timid about barging in as a reporter. So I sent my wife—told her to go down to the place, get herself stylishly busted, and report back to me.

She said they really go about the thing scientifically and that the process is more complicated than filling a tooth, although they don't drill. In the first place, she figured they'd take some measurements and let it go at that. Not at all. She was told to strip to the waist. The lady engineer who handled her case then stood off and took sights on the issues involved.

"Petite," she finally said. "Yes, you are the petite type."

(I have spent two solid days in forceful argument getting the patient's permission to use the above quoted diagnosis. I call it a major triumph.)

There were all sorts of posturings, with much taking of notes, and then the blueprints were handed over to the construction department. My wife learned that padding is practiced today almost as widely as shoe wearing. At one point she took up the matter of her own classification as the "petite type" and said that this designation was not exactly flattering to her.

"Oh, my dear," said the lady, "you should never worry about that. You should see the parade of breasts that come through here. My dear, I have two customers who have four breasts each!"

My representative gasped in astonishment, but the lady declared her statement to be God's truth. In each case, she said, the four-mammaed customers were equipped with breasts occupying the time-honored positions. The spares grew out six inches below the normal pair. One of these fortunate women (or unfortunate, if you

choose) was around thirty years old. All four of her breasts were of approximately the same size and they were not petite. She didn't give a damn beyond the fact that whenever she bought a brassière she had to have a special job. She couldn't very well go into a department store and say, "I'll take a Mabs Plant-ease and while you're at it, sew a Hickory Perma lift on the bottom of it."

"When she comes in for a fitting," said the expert, "we have to build her a bra that extends from the hips to the shoulders. It runs into money."

The other girl upon whom Nature bestowed bountiful gifts and then some is around eighteen years old. She is undergoing a series of treatments aimed at causing her lowers to recede without affecting her uppers. The treatment involves taking hormones, and the lady in the brassière plant says it is beginning to show results. If I were the doctor in such a case I believe I would hesitate before giving such a treatment. Nature can sometimes be unpredictable. The girl is given hormones and the duty of those hormones is to eliminate two of those four breasts. Hormones have no intelligence. You can't point to the two breasts you want done away with and expect a hormone to understand. I'd be afraid the hormones would go to work and wipe out the wrong udders—maybe take away the upper left and the lower right and leave the girl built on a bias.

But enough of such scientific matters



## LIBEL REFUTED

Hollywood has been grossly libeled by certain moralistic commentators who say it is not true that movie producers prey upon ambitious young females, that the producers trade movie jobs or promises of movie jobs for virtue. These misguided sources would have the nation believe that producers are inhuman, capable of overlooking a sexy girl's sexiness. Of course that's not true. Producers are the same as department store managers and newspaper editors and book publishers and cheese manufacturers and district attorneys and advertising executives.



## HIPPOPOTAMUS

"Get this, said a producer 'I'm gonna do this jungle picture and it's gonna be the biggest, the greatest jungle picture in history Everything about it is gonna be great It's gonna have everything—the most tigers, the most lions, the most zebras, the most elephants And a hippopotamus Fellas, this picture is gonna have the biggest hippopotamus in the world in it "

"Where do you expect to get it?" a writer asked

"I should worry my head about such things!" said the producer "When I say I want the biggest hippopotamus in the world, I want the biggest God damn hippopotamus in history! Now, you tell me where we get it "

They put the research department to work on the problem, and in passing I'd like to say that the research departments in the movie studios are superb In no time at all the producer was notified that the biggest hippopotamus in the world, at least the biggest hippopotamus in captivity, was the property of the London Zoo

"Buy the son of a bitch!" ordered the dynamic producer, and negotiations were opened by cable After a while a price, something like \$50,000, was agreed upon and the question of transportation arose The London Zoo people urged that the buyer engage the services of the two regular hippopotamus keepers—men who knew how to handle the beast

"How much salary?" came the cabled query The two men could be hired for fifty dollars a week each

"No!" roared the producer He was willing to spend \$50,000 for the hippo, but he balked at fifty dollars a week for keepers "We got people in this studio," he said, 'who can handle any animal on earth. Why pay them guys?"

A couple of men from the prop department were shipped off to London with instructions to bring back the hippo They got him on a ship and they got him off the ship and into a special freight car. In due course the car arrived in Los Angeles The next problem

was to get the hippopotamus out of the freight car and into the movie jungle. But the hippo wouldn't co-operate.

"He won't co-operate," they told the producer. This phrase is a common one around the studios, whether applied to a human or a hippopotamus.

"Drag him out of it," said the producer.

They ripped off the upper structure of the freight car, leaving the hippo sprawled in full view. They built runways, but the hippo spurned them. He was a sick hippopotamus. He was out of his element. Those men from the prop department were capable when it came to handling period furniture, but they really knew nothing about the mental processes of a hippopotamus since prop men have little contact with the front office.

After hours of wrestling with the problem they hired the biggest flat bed truck they could find and backed it up to the flat car. They brought in a powerful crane. They fastened chains around the recumbent beast and they drug him off. There is no such word as drug, as used in the foregoing sentence, but I like it and I'm writing this book, not you. They drug him onto the truck and drove him to the place where the jungle had been built. Now a new problem arose. The hippopotamus was prone to stay prone. They didn't want to drag him off the truck and onto the ground for fear they would break him. Then along came someone with a thought bordering on intelligence.

"That hippopotamus is sick as a dog," he said. "He has got to be up to his chin in water. An animal like that sops up water through his pores. He's been away from water so long he's a nervous wreck."

They agreed, then, that he should be put in water for a while. But where? Someone remembered a small lake out north of Hollywood.

"Lease the lake," ordered the producer, "and dump the bastard in."

They leased the lake. They drove the truckload of hippopotamus to the shore. He showed no interest in the water. They didn't want to roll him off into shallow water for fear he'd founder in the mud and never get loose. So they summoned an army of studio carpen-

ters and quickly built a heavy pier extending out to deep water. When the pier was finished and tested they backed the truck onto it. Next they brought up a hoisting engine. They blocked the rear wheels of the truck securely, attached a line to the front of the truck, and slowly tilted it upward. At an angle of around forty-five degrees the hulk of hippopotamus began to move. The great beast slid slowly off the tilted truck, then hit the water with a mighty splash. The job had been done neatly and without a hitch, and a great cheer went up among the workmen on shore.

The animal went under the water at once and silence settled over the spectators as they waited for his reappearance. The seconds ticked off and nothing happened. More seconds, and still nothing.

The biggest God-damn hippopotamus in the world hasn't come up to this day.



## LADY IN BLACK

After Rudolph Valentino was entombed this press agent had an idea. One August 23—the anniversary of the actor's death—he inveigled a reporter and photographer to stand watch with him near the crypt. Soon a big car drove up and out of it stepped a woman dressed all in black and wearing a heavy veil. She placed some red roses at the tomb, knelt briefly, and didn't seem to notice it when the photographer's camera clicked. When the reporter stepped out to question her, however, she high tailed it into the car and escaped.

It was a master stroke for the press agent. Newspapers all over the country played up the story of "The Lady in Black." There was wide public speculation on her identity. So what happened? The next August 23 there were two ladies in black with garlands of red roses. The year after that there were more. And the thing finally reached the point where ladies in black were practically trampling one another underfoot to get to the tomb. All the cemetery press agent had done was hire the original lady in black. He didn't know he'd fetch out a rash of them in future years.



## FRED ALLEN SPEAKS

"Look at the people on the street here," said Fred Allen "The Hollywood housewives put on their pajamas and dark glasses and march up and down the sidewalks, thinking the tourists will mistake them for movie stars And the tourists—they put on pajamas and dark glasses and march up and down, hoping other tourists will mistake them for stars"

He said that a few nights after his arrival he was riding in an automobile along an avenue populated by faith healers, truss adjusters, spiritualists, sundry whiskered messiahs and inventors of perpetual motion machines Suddenly the car came abreast of a mansion with a spreading lawn, and on the lawn was a huge neon sign flashing out the following

GOD WANTS TO SEE YOU! COME RIGHT IN!

He told of the manner in which Hollywood morticians advertise their establishments with zippy radio programs and billboard displays One old, established undertaking firm steadfastly refused to join this colossal promotion movement, but at last its directors surrendered to the march of progress They put up dozens of huge billboards all over town, describing themselves simply as

THE UNDERTAKERS WHO DO NOT ADVERTISE

"There are so many weird things you can see in a single day," Fred went on "Across the street from NBC is a shoeshine stand where the colored fellow will not shine your shoes without turning on some swing music and beating time against your ankles with his brushes, thus attracting large crowds who stand and watch you being polished in ragtime

"Next door is a drugstore I was in there the other day and at the soda fountain saw a sign which said, 'Your Horoscope Free with a Lucky Sundae—Both for 14 Cents'

"Drive out toward Burbank and you'll come to the place they

call the Columbia Ranch. Right next to the road, in full view, is an awful mess of moldy papier-mâché, decayed scaffolding and drooping, collapsing trees. This is the place where they filmed *Lost Horizon*, and all that soggy mess is Shangri la, the Eternal City—Paradise.”

A couple of the Merry Macs came by and asked Fred and Portland where they had been keeping themselves. When they had gone Fred resumed his jeremiad.

“Just this morning I ran into Fred Othman of the United Press. He happened to be at Paramount the day Dorothy Lamour had her hair cut. Freddie asked her if he could cut off the first lock and after he had done it he kept the hair. He wrote a story about it. The story went out over the wires and was used in a couple of hundred newspapers all over the country. In the story Freddie said he would be glad to give the lock of Lamour hair to the first person who wrote in.

“The next day a deluge of telegrams and long distance calls came down on him from as far away as my home town, Boston. Even now his mail is coming by the sackful—all from people begging for that lock of hair, even offering to pay him large sums of money for it.”



## DEMILLE AT WORK

Whenever DeMille is shooting even the case hardened secretaries around the studio knock off work to watch it because The Master puts on a bigger show than the actors. They got everything all set for the hospital scene right after lunch. I was hanging out the window when I witnessed the arrival of The Master. He came around the corner by Paulette Goddard's dressing room. Walking with him, or, rather, a step or two behind him, were his personal aides—half a dozen of them. He arrived with dignity and a slow, deliberate step. He looked neither to right nor left, ignoring the mob of studio employees gathered on the side lines. He spoke not a word but came on into the sunlight and stopped finally alongside the big technicolor camera. His eyes were fixed on the scene before him and they

stayed there. He took off his hat and tossed it over his shoulder without looking back. A hand came up and snatched it before it had traveled two feet. He took off his necktie and cast it into the air behind him. A necktie man grabbed it. Slowly The Master unbuttoned his jacket, still staring fixedly at the scene. He let the jacket slip from his arms but it never came near the ground. A jacket man behind him swept it out of the air as it started to fall. I was surprised, then, to see Mr. DeMille roll up his own sleeves.



## NUDIST PICTURE

A producer decided to turn out a film about a nudist camp. This producer opened negotiations with an actual nudist colony and got permission to bring in a cameraman. It was stipulated that the half-dozen movie people should strip themselves naked and remain in that condition during the time they were in the camp. The cameraman was an obstinate, opinionated guy named Willie, and Willie objected to nudity on practical as well as moral grounds. He said the entire project was ridiculous but he agreed to co-operate up to a certain point.

"I'll take off my pants and shoes and socks and shirt and underwear," he said, "but by God I'm gonna wear my vest. I got to have a place to carry my screw driver and my pliers."

It was agreed that Willie could wear his vest and thus attired, he went grudgingly about his duties. The camera was of primordial design and operated by a hand crank. It was perched on a tripod and the legs of the tripod could be folded together.

Willie was shooting a scene on a grassy hillside. He finished the job and prepared to move to another spot. He reached down and shoved the legs of the tripod together. Yipe! He let out a piercing scream and fell to the ground as though poleaxed, the camera on top of him. The legs of the tripod had locked on him and he was howling and clawing the air. The producer rushed to the rescue and pried the tripod open, releasing its wounded prey. They threw cold



## **HOLLYWOOD**

water on Willie and tried to comfort him with kind words. At last he got to his feet. He picked up a two by-four and beat the tripod to splinters. Then he turned on the producer and would have slain him then and there except that the man was fast on his feet and got away. Willie put on his pants and the rest of his clothes and departed, announcing that he was finished. He never worked in pictures again, and disappeared from the scene. He probably figured people would laugh at him and point him out as the man who got his formal dances caught in a tripod.



## **GENIUS**

A movie studio is a newspaper office on a large scale, crowded with eccentric, capricious, temperamental screwballs. All you need do is shut your eyes and spit and you're bound to hit a genius. The geniuses come in three sizes: those who are geniuses and know they are geniuses and speak about it frequently, those who are actually not geniuses but somebody told them they were so they do everything but wear badges proclaiming it, and genuine geniuses who keep their mouths shut about their affliction and do their work.



## **GRAVEYARD**

Forest Lawn Memorial Park is man's most splendid achievement in the way of graveyards. From a scenic point of view it is a magnificent place, provided the viewer lacks the imagination that I have, an imagination that won't let me forget the ghastly things that are hidden away, underground and in the crypts. The lawns, the fountains, the flowers, the pools, the trees, the statuary, the edifices—these things are sufficient to overwhelm a lover of beauty. This "happy cemetery" with its "Resurrection Slope" is the same place that Bruce Barton, an advertising man and a former member of Congress, called "a first step upward toward Heaven" in a signed

and framed testimonial Mr Barton suggested also that tourists go back to their cities and towns and establish similar cemeteries, declaring that "not until that happens will we be able to call ourselves a truly Christian nation "

Forest Lawn is a big business enterprise founded by a banker who, back in 1817, acquired some property through foreclosure of a mortgage, went out to have a look at it, and while having that look also had "a vision " This vision led him to the conclusion that existing cemeteries "are wrong because they depict an end, not a beginning " Today the fruit of that vision is one of the first things tourists are urged to see in southern California, and it would take more than a full day to cover everything—the graves and crypts of the stars, the Wee Kirk o the Heather, the \$4,500,000 Mausoleum, the Tower of Legends, Babyland, and even the building which houses the Forest Lawn Life Insurance Company Funerals and burials are not exclusively the business of Forest Lawn, for many weddings are performed there Near the Wee Kirk o the Heather is the Annie Laurie Wishing Chair, built of stones taken from the original Wee Kirk in Scotland After people get married in the Wee Kirk they go out and sit in the Wishing Chair and maybe kiss each other This is supposed to bring them luck, so that they won't be beating each other on the skulls with sash weights

If you want to be buried in Forest Lawn you can make a deal for as low as forty five dollars That puts you on one of the lower slopes where, I suppose, you'll have a longer wait come Judgment Day. And if you don't have the forty five dollars arrangements can be made One of the Forest Lawn advertising appeals sums it up pretty well in this fashion "Everything in time of sorrow, in one sacred place, under one friendly management with one convenient credit arrangement and a year to pay "

Chuck Daggett tells of the time a New York newspaperman arrived for his first visit in Hollywood as guest of a movie studio The visitor was taken through the studio and then he said he'd enjoy seeing some of the other sights in Hollywood He was escorted all over town, to the Hollywood Bowl, to that fantastic institution known as the Farmers Market, to assorted Brown Derbies, to the

Sunset Strip, to Griffith Park, to UCLA, and to Grauman's Footprint. At last he arrived in Forest Lawn Memorial-Park. He drank in all the shining beauty, all the splendor of the place and as he gazed upon its sheer loveliness he sighed and said:

"By God, these Hollywood people sure know how to live!"



# THE WILD WEST





## ADVENTURE IN GLOBE

The hotel was a few doors away, and the lobby was almost deserted. I stopped at the desk and picked up a newspaper and was glancing at it when a cowboy came through a door at the rear. He was inebriated, and he had the look of an outlaw. His huge hat was battered and dirty, his shirt was dirty, and his levis were white from washing and then dirty from wearing. He was a big man, inclined toward paunchiness, and he was so ingloriously drunk that he was slobbering. He lurched up to me and seized me by the arm.

"You know Albert?" he demanded.

"No, sir," I said. I called him "sir" because I am a coward.

"Oh"—he sneered—"so ya don' know Albert!"

"No, sir," I repeated. Apparently not knowing Albert was a serious offense in this man's code.

"Then Ah'm gonna whup you," he said.

I didn't say anything, but trembled a little. He reeled around as he went through the business of squaring off preliminary to whupping me.

"Ah'm a mean son of a bitch," he said.

"Sure," I agreed.

"Wha's that you said?"

"I said sure, your a—— You're what you said."

"You call me a son of a bitch?" he roared.

"Now wait a minute. You're the one said it. I didn't say it."

"I said it?" he repeated. "Wha' I said?"

"Oh, nothing. Forget about it, my friend."

"Listen," he said, moving in and grabbing hold of me again, "you know Albert?"

I wasn't enjoying it, not one bit. Why didn't help come? Where was the sheriff? Where was Deputy Bell? Where the hell were the hotel people? This cockeyed Black Bart had me trapped. I tried to tell myself that I had to keep cool, use my head. I changed my tactics.

"Yes," I said. "I know Albert."

"Where's Albert?"

Now an inspiration came. I pointed to the street door.

"Albert just went out that door," I said.

"Wise guy!" he bellowed. "Ah'm gonna whup you good. Ah'm a mean son of a bitch! You know that? You know. Ah'm a mean son of a bitch?"

"Sure," I said, making the same mistake twice.

"Oh ho! So you call me son of a bitch! Ah'm gonna break your neck!"

He lunged, and I ducked under his arm and walked fast and got away from him. But only for the moment. That guy plagued and pestered me for the next five hours. I was three or four blocks from the hotel when he staggered around a corner, grabbed me, and started asking about Albert. He went into the same routine about being a mean son of a bitch, demanding agreement from me. If I disagreed and said he wasn't one, then he'd want to prove that he was by breaking my neck, and if I agreed, then I was calling him a son of a bitch and he would break my neck. It was quite a problem. I escaped from him once again, but later in the evening he got me a third time in the hotel lobby. This time my neck was rescued by the appearance on the scene of the mysterious Albert. Albert was the hotel's Negro porter.

"Winnie," he said to my antagonist, "you ready fer bed now?"

"Albert!" cried Winnie. And Albert led Winnie away. I learned later that Winnie is a ranch hand who comes to town periodically and gets himself stinking and Albert always in the end takes care of him, bedding him down for the night in a back room of the hotel. At this distance in time and space I would like to make one positive observation. That Winnie is a mean son of a bitch.





## ARIZONA DRIVING

Dip Dip Dip Dip Dip Dip

That's a picture of the highways in the flatter portions of Arizona. You come down from the mountains and hit level country and think that now you'll make some time, but you won't. The pavement runs along for a half mile and then up pops a highway sign that says, "Dip," and underneath the word is a wide U—a scale drawing of the dip and a fairly accurate one. Now you brake down to thirty or less and descend into the dip and come out of it, bouncing your baggage. You accelerate, and about the time the needle hits fifty you see another dip sign up ahead. Each dip represents a dry wash, or junior gully. It is like driving in and out of a series of cisterns. There are at least two ways of getting killed in dips. The first is to hit one of them at high speed, the second is to arrive at the bottom of a dip simultaneously with a flash flood. Easterners are always warned about these flash floods, but they don't believe a word of the warning until they are drowned in one. It is, I think, the worst form of drowning open to mankind.

It all begins with rain in the mountains. For technical reasons which I don't understand the rain water bunches up into a big gob, rolls down the mountain, finds the dry washes, gets into them, and then races toward the highway after the fashion of a tidal wave. I didn't see it happen, but people said the water arrives all at once. A man and his wife may be riding along making gay little jokes about the dips and the dip signs such as, "Well, here we come to another pickpocket," and then dip into a dip and wham! A wall of water six or eight feet high will hit them. This would be bad enough if the assaulting element were nothing more than plain water, usually it is more than that—a mixture of water and boulders—and when this mixture finds itself an automobile to work on it engages in a grinding operation which has a pulverizing effect. This, like cancer, is bad for you.

As the highway gets closer to Tucson many of the dips have

names; and we came to one with a sign describing it as the Tom Mix. I suspected that this was the spot where Tom Mix was killed and verified that suspicion later. The cowboy star hit that dip at something over seventy and died there, and they named it after him. A peculiar way of honoring a man—making a memorial out of the instrument that killed him



## SAND AND WATER

Arizona is the most alarmingly fascinating state in the Republic. Here is one place where the land has more character than the inhabitants, where the native vegetation will curdle the most powerful weed killer known to science and then creep up on a man and stab him to death. Contemplated with the eye of an artist, the desert is a lovely thing, but it won't lie still. It gets up and roves briskly around the landscape and assaults everything in sight. I have not yet had the misfortune to experience a desert sandstorm, but they say it'll take the finish off your car and the hair off your head and the hide off your mule. The way an Arizona housewife polishes her kitchenware is to hold it in front of the front-door keyhole when the wind is high. The continuing scarcity of water is a bigger problem than the rattlesnakes, and I have been told that an Arizona rattlesnake ranks among the wonders of the world, he isn't content to give you a conservative fanging—he'll rare back and drive his head clean through your middle and then bite you from behind. The water problem is best illustrated in a story involving an old friend of mine who met an Arizona girl during the war and married her and went out to live for a while in the home of her parents. His in-laws were wild about him at first, and thought he was a wonderful guy and a great catch for their daughter, and then after a few days they began to grow cool toward him, and they eyed him with distrust. They made it clear now that they believed their daughter had married a bum. At last he called his bride off to one side and demanded to know what he had done to incur their disfavor. She told him. His sin, she said, was that he *flushed for everything*.



## THE PRAIRIE

We crossed the Missouri River and headed straight west through genuine prairie country. Here on these enormous plains the human imagination has a tendency to get out of control. The setting is straight out of the storybooks and the movie screen, unless some sort of brake is put on it the emotional part of the brain takes over and populates these bleak prairies with impossible figures. The prairie impresses us only because we have been conditioned to regard it with emotion, it has been romanticized down through the years, peopled with skulking redskins, with outlaw bands made up of men who wear black hats and black shirts and have black mustaches and black horses and black hearts, and, most important of all, with the Great American Hero—fresh out of the barber chair, his guns slung low, his white hat bigger than any road agent's black hat, his horse whiter than his hat and endowed with a genius for untying knots, and his heart nine tenths of one per cent purer than Ivory Soap. It does no good to say that no such person ever raced across these prairies. It does no good to say that the heroes of this immense flatland looked more like Gabby Hayes than Roy Rogers—with matted whiskers and few if any teeth and with a body odor that would send coyotes screeching in the direction of Saskatchewan.



## THE BAD LANDS

It is customary for writers to "write purty" about the Bad Lands, employing the stylistic frenzy that is the stock in trade of the people who compose advertisements for the motion pictures. These scenery writers invariably have their souls stirred right down to the bottom of the barrel when they contemplate the Bad Lands, and apparently they can see well through dust that could be spaded. They speak of luted spires and the majesty of the cathedral like pinnacles and the subtle bands of color and the ghostly shapes and darkling vales and

delicate subtones; and then they go into a routine about the weirdness of it, the fascination, and the awfulness of it. And almost invariably at this point they enter into communion with the eternal verities, and philosophy begins to boil out of them. My own estimate of this eroded landscape is that it's different and that its attraction lies in its being different. If our whole country were one big Bad Lands and somewhere in South Dakota there lay a piece of prairie, flat and grassy, hundreds of thousands of tourists would claw their way to it and photograph each other sitting on it, and the scenery writers would come to it and indulge themselves in contemplative speculation, and they would see in it an awful beauty and a cosmic glory. I imagine, too, that they would call that flat piece of property "cathedral-like"



### JUDGE ROY BEAN

The town of Langtry, Texas had no jail in Judge Roy Bean's time, so he usually imposed either a fine or the death sentence on defendants brought before him. Sometimes, however, it was necessary to imprison drunks until they got sober enough to face trial, so they were tied to the mesquite trees.

We poked around in the little court building and leaned against the old bar which was sacred to the memory of a great jurist—the man who once fined a corpse forty dollars for carrying a concealed weapon, who acquitted an Irishman of murdering a Chinaman because he was unable to find anywhere in his single lawbook a specific statute forbidding the killing of a Chinaman. This man, who called himself the Law West of the Pecos, was a smelly old billy goat with the moral sense of a half-witted wombat, yet he is remembered, talked about and written about and admired. He is admired, I suspect, because most men secretly believe the law is a ass, a idiot; cause most men resent the halo of infallibility worn by the average judge and especially his attempts to clothe himself with the dignity usually reserved for the gods. Any time Roy Bean was performing

his rites according to the traditions of judicial dignity his tongue was in his cheek opposite the wad of tobacco.



## THE WESTERN LIAR

The chief industry of Deadwood, South Dakota is prevarication. The town is loaded with geezers who sit around and gas about the famous days of the gun slingers. One would judge from a cursory reading of Deadwood's history that the citizens did nothing but drink whisky, play poker, shoot each other dead, and go to whore houses. There is a pair of mounted animal heads in one of the resorts at Deadwood which might serve as a civic emblem. One is the head of a deer and one is the head of an antelope, but the horns have been switched, and the liars of Deadwood tell you that these are the only specimens known to man of the anteldeer and the deerlope. All you need in Deadwood is a touch of gray in your hair and a crick in your back and you are entitled to say that you were personally acquainted with Wild Bill Hickok and shuck him by the hand.

The caliber of the lying that has gone on for years in Deadwood is such that today nobody really knows anything real definite about Wild Bill before or during his brief stay in this town. He had his brains blown out here by a man named Jack McCall, but nobody knows why.

Wholesale lying about the way it was in the old days is general throughout the West, and self-confessed honest men have devised certain tests by which they say they can determine if a man is genuine or a fraud.

If he gets out of bed in the morning and dresses himself by first putting on his hat, then his underwear, then his shirt, then his coat, then his pants, then his socks, and finally his shoes—he is a genuine westerner. He undresses at night in reverse, starting with his shoes and taking off his hat last. This technique of dressing and undressing is traditional among authentic westerners and comes from years of sleeping in bedrolls in the great outdoors.

Another test is simple. Ask the man under suspicion to pass the salt. If he picks up the saltcellar in the ordinary way, as I do it, he is a fraud. If he cups his hand over the top of it and takes hold of it at its base, using all his fingers—in precisely the way a man picks up a stack of poker chips—then he is genuine.



## A SHOCKING STATE

South Dakota is the only state in the Union that doesn't brag about itself. It is the antithesis of Texas. The people of South Dakota in fact apologize for their commonwealth, for themselves and the shape they are in, and for their domestic beasts. This attitude of humility and self mortification on the part of the inhabitants helps to make South Dakota one of the most captivating communities in the Republic.

From the Minnesota line to the Wyoming border they speak disparagingly of their homeland. The weather, they say, is simply terrible, consisting of four seasons, every one of them a curse and a tribulation, the land for the most part is so bad that worms won't live in it, there are more rattlesnakes running around loose than there are humans, yes, they say, we have more pheasants than anybody else, and we're sorta famous for pheasants, but the ring necked dumbbells are forever flying into the path of your automobile and coming through the windshield and killing you. South Dakota is traditionally Republican, but there is little blustering about it.

"Sure, we're Republicans," a citizen said, "but we can't help it. It's not our fault. Our parents were Republicans, so we had to be Republicans."

South Dakota has three nicknames. It is the Coyote State—the coyote is the state animal, and it goes without saying that nobody in South Dakota has any particular liking for a coyote. It is the Sunshine State—its sunshine is of the quality that will vulcanize rubber. And it is the Blizzard State. When they use the expression "blizzard" out there they mean a state of affairs which would depress a walrus. The clanking noises that are heard in South Dakota during

the late fall are made by the state's brass monkeys migrating to kindlier climes

Ask an intelligent citizen to tell you the state's chief architectural feature, and he'll say rather glumly, 'Our contribution to architecture is the blank wall on the north. We never put doors or windows in the north walls of our houses'



## EYES OF TEXAS

In Alpine we began to acquire an awareness of the fact that Texans regard their state not only as a country in itself, but a world in itself. At that football game just as we reached our seats the school band paraded onto the field, went into position facing the crowd, and everyone stood up. The men removed their hats and placed them over their hearts and those without hats placed their hands there. I waited for the opening bars of the "Star-Spangled Banner," but they didn't come. Instead the band played "I've Been Workin' on the Railroad." That is unofficially the Texas anthem, and when it is played strong men bow their heads and sometimes make a silent vow to destroy Oklahoma. The tune is the railroad song, but the words are different, and the anthem is called "The Eyes of Texas Are Upon You." This was a phrase used frequently years ago by the president of the young university at Austin. Apparently his students were not too interested in education, so he would remind them now and then that the eyes of Texas were upon them. One day when they were getting up a campus minstrel show they decided to poke some fun at the prexy's nagging cry concerning the eyes of Texas. They used the railroad tune and wrote new words, and a joke became an anthem, and today if you are in Texas and hear that music and don't get to your feet you're likely to be jerked there.

I remember asking the hotel manager in Alpine where all the antelope hunters came from. "They're from all over the country," he said. Subsequently I learned that he meant they were from all over Texas. And it was in Alpine that an elderly citizen disappeared

for a couple of weeks, and when he turned up someone asked him where he had been.

"Been travelin'," he said.

"Where'd you go?"

"Went as fur east as I could git without gittin' outa the country."

"New York?"

"Corpus," he said.



## END OF THE TRAIL

The missions converted the Indians—the ones they could catch with lassos. The Indians didn't want to be converted. They had a sneaking suspicion that the coming of the Mexicans had done them no great good. For one thing, they had to wear clothes and they didn't like that. For another, they began taking down with disease which they didn't understand. The men got these diseases from the women, who got them from the soldiers and then tried to tell the husbands that they got them off toilets. The husbands didn't fa for the explanation because there were no toilets. It was the custom of the soldiers to ride around on their horses until they spotted a Indian lady they fancied. They would lasso her and have their la of will with her. The mission priests objected to such conduct and were always feuding with the military about it.

The technique of these soldiers calls for a digression because it reminds me of a story told by my friend Ben Serkowich. He sd that out West when the earliest rodeos were organized the cowboys had an extra event known as corset-dogging. It was similar to bil-dogging or calf roping except that the cowboys didn't use horses. A young woman would be turned loose from a chute and she'd lit out down the field. Then the cowboy contestant would be relead from another chute. He'd tear out, on foot, in pursuit of the n-ning woman, and he'd be carrying a corset. His job was to catch he woman, throw her to the turf, get the corset around her, and la it. The cowboy who finished his corset-dogging in the best time on the contest. I'm skeptical about the whole thing. Ben Serkowi is



an authority on Western lore by virtue of having said hello once to Buffalo Bill in an Omaha hotel. Buffalo Bill didn't answer him.

One history of Los Angeles takes up the conversion of the Indians in great detail. These Indians, as I've said, didn't want it because it meant going to work in the mission fields; also it meant being baptized, which was pretty close to taking a bath, and that was ignominious and degrading.

So, what with venereal diseases and one thing and another, the Indians died out.



## A COWBOY'S HAT

Zip's hat was solid black with a three-inch brim and differed from the generality of western hats in the fact that it was soft and light, weighing just under three ounces. The Zip LeBaron hat, worn by thousands of juvenile Zip LeBarons, had its origin with the hero himself. Back in his childhood he had seen an exciting picture of a pony express rider, racing across the prairie with a band of Indians in pursuit, and the brim of the rider's ancient hat was plastered flat against the crown by the force of the wind. That picture remained in Zip's mind a long time and when he became a cowboy actor he insisted on a hat with a limp brim that would react in the same manner during a hard ride. At the beginning of his career the hat met with considerable opposition. The production people agreed that it looked good, looked even thrilling when the wind was beating the brim back against the crown; but all too often the wind flapped it downward, covering Zip's eyes as he rode in pursuit of the outlaws. It was ridiculous, as Howey Blankenship said, for a cowboy hero to come riding hell-for-leather across the plains with the brim of his black hat plastered down against his face, covering not only his eyes but his nose. Howey proposed having the brim braced in some manner so that it could only flap upward, but Zip refused to have anything to do with such an artifice; he solved the problem himself. He developed a technique to insure himself almost always against blind riding. At the beginning of any hard ride, it became

second nature for him to throw his head back, so the wind would catch the underside of the brim and flap it into position. Thus there came into being a Zip LeBaron mannerism that was copied over the length and breadth of the land. That backward toss of the head became another Zip LeBaron trademark—the juvenile population identified it as a gesture of defiance and derring do, never employed save in moments of danger and great decision. When Zip LeBaron, whirling Sodbuster at the sound of shots in the distant canyon, urged the big golden horse forward and at the same instant threw back his head, that single action told his audience “Look out, you dirty outlaws, here comes Mister Zip!” The kids took it up so widely that there were unhappy sociological consequences. A schoolteacher in a Pennsylvania town complained that many of her pupils, called upon to recite, had developed the unnerving habit of tossing their heads back violently before plunging into the job at hand. And a leading Chicago chiropractor issued a statement to the press saying that the head-tossing children would very likely grow up to have serious neck tics.



#### SLANTHEAD ELDER OBSERVES

There ain't no West. I was what you call a real cowboy thirty years ago up in Wyomin'. Now, you take back in the 1880's, maybe they was a West that was a little like they have it in books and movies. But come to think of it, not much like. You know the way we got it in pictures—about all we do with cattle is herd 'em a little and rustle 'em and unrustle 'em and drive 'em through the pass. Hell's farr, bov, you oughta see what a *real* cowboy's gotta do with them critters. First place, a cow's the dumbest animal in the world. Ornery. Mean. A mule ain't in it for bein' stubborn. One a the worst jobs a real cowboy's got on a ranch is pullin' bog—the dumb critters get sunk in the bogs and gotta be hauled out. You get ropes on 'em and then two or three fellas on horses start pullin', and you finally drag the son of a—the son of-a bitch out, and what does she give you in the way a thanks? In verrvibly she tries to kill you—tries

to kill the men that drug her out and saved her stinkin' life. And the docterin' you got to do! A critter has almost always got some kinda disease, and if she has a short spell a health, why then the bugs are at 'er, and you got to fight them, and if you lay your hat down on the ground she'll walk right over and crap on it, and all the time yer not playin' nursemaid to these dumb bastards, why yer workin' in the hayfields, workin' like a section hand, and fixin' fence and hoein' the goddam vegetable garden and, so help me, hangin' out the warsh fer the missus of the ranch. Then you take the bums you got to work with—worst packa human beings ever let loose on this earth—don't take a bath oncet a year, got granulated eyelids, eat like hogs, crawlin' with greybacks and don't even bother to scratch—— What I'm tryin' to tell you is that there are some real cowboys that are good people in this world. Right by God here in Hollywood. You take that bunch that hangs around the Short Cut. There's yer real cowboys. Maybe a few bums amongst 'em—but most of 'em are good. Them's the people yer lookin' fer.

Real cowboys are ignernt. Got nothin' to talk about. Know what they do in the winter time? Play a game called "Readin' Can." They set around and recite from memry every word that's printed on a canna beans er a canna v.: rated milk—that's all they can find to do is memrise the printin' on all the cans and then recite it to each other. You go out amongst them, and what'll you find? They squat around on their heels. Ever time a couple of cowboys get together, they squat down on their hunkers. Wouldn't set on a chair if the whole prairie was sproutin' chairs. Wouldn't set down on the ground er on the steps. Always set on their heels. Lotsa times they have sticks in their hands, and draw pictures in the dirt, and maps. They squat around and one of them'll start drawin' on the ground and he'll say, "Now, if you really want to git to town the short way, you go like this here, and thev's a fork right here, and you foller it off this way, and right here is a ray veen, but you don't go through that." And so on. Then a big argyment develops. The other fella says that's not the shortest way to town, and he draws a picture. That's all they know how to talk about—how fur it is to town.

I know about Satan City Total population is borax miners one side a the street and whores on the other Ever one a them borax miners is seven foot tall and you hit 'em on the head with a crowbar and they jst grin and then pick you up and beat you to death against the ground Personly, I don't want no part a Satan City, and that goes fer the whole damn deser' too I oo manv crazy people wanderin' around loose in it, now that L A s sloppin' over. I never been able to understand what draws people out to that desert It s about the most fee rocious worst place on earth It draws people out the same way a funeral draws people out They s some-thin' in human bein s makes them want to walk up to a coffin and stare at a dead person Must be the same with the desert, but it only looks dead They talk about Death Valley, but Death Valley ain't dead You git out in Death Valley and if the crazy desert rats don't kill ya, the bushes and cactus will Everything that grows in that damn place carries weapons Littlest ole desert flir will pull a knife on ya if you git close enough And the people! Used to be you could travel fer fiftv mile in the desert and never lay eyes on a human Now the place is swarmin' They s stil' a few ole timers, diggin' around fer gold and oil, but the new batch—they re after you-ranium The way it was years ago a man grubstaked a pros- pector, he give him a side a bacon and a sack fulla canned beans and a shovel Nowadays these desert rats come around askin' to be grubstaked to one a these here Geeger counters

The way people act, you d think that mountain was put over there just to be clumb The only thing ever made to be clumb was a ladder That mountain s standin' over there mindin' its own busi- ness It's not defvin' anybody You might as well climb up on toppa the Warshington Monument and then look down and say, "That concrete pavement down there is defvin' me to jump on it And then jump, and serve you right if you did I don't mind walkin' up a little hill to have a look around, see what's on the other side. But not that one I want to know what s on the other side, I'll dern well go around er

You take on the one hand, a chimp pausv and, on the other

hand, a cow. The chimp-pansy, he'll go up the mountain like a cat up a pole, but the cow won't even try it. The chimp's built fer it and the cow ain't. The thing is, the chimp won't do it because he knows when he gits up there they won't be anything up there he wants.

Bugs won't never bother a drinkin' man. It's a scientific fact that a musketeer'll buzz up to a whisky drinker and take one look er one smell and fly fer his life.

Anything you do to get that horse, it'll be honest. When you take to horse tradin' in any form whatsoever, anything goes. You get involved in a horse deal and there ain't no rules. That's the tradition of the West. You couldn't up and steal him—that's the worst crime in the book. They used to hang a fella fer *thinkin'* about stealin' a horse. But if you could talk a man outa the same horse, then you was looked on as a genius and people tipped their hat to you.

They ain't no rule of the road, fur as I'm concerned, that says I gotta fix flats fer lazy women. I'm a man believes that if a woman can spend a half a day movin' heavy furniture around the house, she can change a little old wheel on an automobile. Fix it yerself, toots!

He's got a little book called the *Scout Manual* he carries around with 'im whirrever he goes. Lives outa that book. It's got a lotta good things in it about tyin' knots and how to fix up a bird with a broke wing and how to git a cinder outa yer eye and respect fer womanhood and the deaf-and-dumb sign langwidge and how to look at a compass and how to go about gittin' a chicken outa a tree and all that. Everything that's in that little book, it's gossapel to him. I was lookin' at it one day and you know what that thing says? It says if a young fella gits ants in his pants, he's sposed to go drown 'em. It says if he gits to thinkin' frisky thoughts about girls, he's sposed to go take a thing called a hip bath in cool wotter—

and set in that cool wotter fer fifteen minutes with the feet hang-in' out!

I recollect when I was a kid back in Newbraska, my mother used to always be warnin' my sister never in her whole life to go to New York City on account a the needle men. Ma'ma said a girl goes to New York and the needle men'll git 'er sure as Christ. The way mama told it, a girl'd be goin' along right in a crowded street and this needle man, he'd edge up to 'er and stick his needle in 'er and she'd drop like she'd been hit on the gourd with a hammer. Then a crowd would flock around and this needle man, he'd say, "Oh dear, this is my sister, she has fainted, will somebody please call me a taxicab so's I can git 'er to the hospital." So they'd call a taxi and the needle man would load the onconscious girl in it and off they'd go to the white slavery business. Mama kep' tellin' my sister that so much my sister never went to New York City in her whole life and she could sing like a goddam lark and woulda probly got in the opry if she hadden been afraid a them needle men.

I don't want to appear to be antagonistic tworge you, but you ain't much.

That damn Number Three, he ain't never gonna learn to untie a knot. I been workin' with him the last four days. Dumbest horse I ever see. A pure churn-head. Why, I've knowed cows that was smarter'n that horse. I knowed a burro once learned to drag a knot loose from his own forelegs. And I knowed a horse, we had him but at Newhall, horse by the name of Jazzbo, workin' in a Hoot Gibson picture as I remember—that horse could tie a knot. Seen him with my own eyes—tied Charlie King's hands at the wrists, tied a knot as good as any habbrydasher. But this horse—I swear I soaked that rope in sugar wotter and then I rubbed it all over with a chocklit bar, and the jughead son-of-a-bitch—I bag yer pardon. Fergot myself. But if you don't mind my argyin' a little, I feel argymennanive. I don't know what you got against that expression. I've knowed men that was completely crazy about dogs, kissed 'em.

slep' in the same bed with 'em, cried like a goddam baby when they took sick—still and all, you call a man like that a son-of-a-bitch and he considers it the worst insult on earth. It don't make sense.

It happens that I'm a lone drinker Never drink with people. When the time comes I start drinkin' with people, then I know it's time to give it up altogether.





# LIFE IN THE SUBURBS





## THE PERVERSITY OF NATURE

For a time I kept a file devoted to observations under the general heading: Perversity of Nature.

For example, on a winter's day I go to town and get a pint of ice cream and bring it home. The thermometer outside the kitchen door indicates a temperature of 22 degrees. So I leave the ice cream outdoors and when I go to get it at dinnertime, it has turned into a soup. Yet, at the same time, there'll be a sheet of ice three inches thick on the driveway, frozen so hard that I can't even get it off with a pickax.

There's a small patch of lawn across from the breezeway and for three years I've been trying to get some grass to grow properly on it. I seed it and water it and li: c it and fertilize it and tote bushel after bushel of leaf mold out of the woods and scatter on it. The grass comes up in little tufts, if it comes up at all, and most of the seed washes over onto the pavement—a three-inch layer of Colprovia that cost me a fortune—and there, on the pavement, takes root and grows like mad. Some of the seed works its way down under the pavement and grows so energetically that it pushes up lumps in the Colprovia before it breaks through. So I get out the sprayer and load it with weed-killer, mixed so strong that it almost withers the brass nozzle, and I saturate the grass that is defacing my beautiful pavement. Does it kill the grass? Hell, no. Yet a slight gust of wind can take a little mist from that spray and waft it across the stone wall and gently caress a twenty-foot evergreen tree and kill it dead in its tracks. And the grass will continue to prosper and the following year will come busting up through that pavement as if it had just eaten a stick of dynamite.

Take the process of building a fire in the fireplace. I wad up newspapers and put plenty of dry kindling on the paper and then three or four logs that have been laying out in the weather for two years. Sometimes it takes me an hour to get a fire going and then only after I've lost patience and thrown a pint of kerosene on it. This sort of thing happens under conditions that are supposedly ideal for starting a fire—the proper draft and all that. Now, let us switch the scene to a room in a big hotel. A man finishes a cigarette. He puts it on the floor and stamps on it. Then he takes it into the bathroom and runs water on it. Then he brings it back and puts it in the middle of an ash tray, and spits on it. That cigarette butt will manage somehow to struggle out of its moribund condition, revive itself, climb out of that ash tray, set fire to the hotel, and kill a hundred men, women, and children.

The perversity of Nature is most apparent, from day to day, in the department of agriculture. Unwanted things almost invariably seem to prosper, things that are wanted play dead. And the more a thing is wanted, the more stubbornly it refuses to grow. Sometimes I get to despairing about the whole thing, and then I think that perhaps my reasoning is at fault. I think of the barber in Arkansas, described to me by Norris Goff. One summer day this barber reached a big decision. He marched to the front entrance of his shop and took down the screen door. Naturally people asked him why. "I finely figgered out," he said, "that a screen door jest natcheral atracks flies."

Maybe Nature isn't so perverse as I think. Maybe it's man that's really perverse. The harder a thing is to grow, the more he'll try to grow it. And he won't have anything to do with flora that leaps from the ground with eagerness and burgeons like a fireworks display. My neighbors groan and I groan with them, over the affright known as crab grass. Yet who's to say that crab grass is evil? Why not plant the lawn to crab grass? People don't like the looks of it but that, very likely, is because they have been taught not to like it. We have here the same condition that exists in the attitude of most people toward snakes. It has been established that a baby does not fear a snake. Put a snake alongside a baby and the baby

will take hold of it and play with it. He will not acquire his fear of snakes until he hears his betters talking about them

Who decides a thing is ugly? Who decides that crab grass is no good and should be set upon and murdered and driven off the face of the earth? Who says wild honeysuckle is an abomination? Who is to say that cats are better to have around than mice? Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to cockroaches.

Somewhere in the world crab grass has friends—and dandelions, and ragweed, and creeping Jennie. Somewhere in the world there is a champion of buzzards, and gnats, and dry rot, and rust. Just recently Fred Othman wrote a column in which he spoke disparagingly of skunks. Up rose the friends of skunks, offering proof that the skunk is an admirable creature, servant to mankind, destroyer of insects and mice and frogs. And what happened after that? Up rose the friends of insects and mice and frogs to denounce the friends of skunks. And along about the same time a controversy raged in the letters column of the *New York Times*. It started when a correspondent let out a beller against restaurant keepers who are cruel to lobsters. The thing that incensed him was the practice in many restaurants of loading the front windows with ice and then putting live lobsters on that ice. Someone quickly answered this complaint with the explanation that crustaceans are cold-blooded creatures and therefore insensitive to cold. But the lobster had more than one champion, and a party name of "C. H." wrote in to challenge the explanation. 'Are we?' he demanded, 'insensitive to heat and fire because our blood is warm? I suffer every time I pass a window full of lobsters and would never enter such a restaurant.'

It is, in fact, a wondrous thing—the way in which every living creature seems to have its friends somewhere in the world. Snails. There is a Snail Watching Society in England with sixty members, dedicated to 'an interest in and appreciation of the snail.' The Society, it goes without saying, is bitterly disposed toward all Gaul



## STRAWBERRY ETHICS

Businessmen who read this will probably laugh at me, and consider me naive, but I say there's more than a hint of dishonesty in them, and their methods get me so wrought up at times that I start hollering my head off in company, so that people who know me sometimes say, 'Omigod, the evening's ruined! He's started on strawberries again!' And my wife often extorts a promise from me, before company comes, saving, 'Promise, now, you won't bring up the strawberries'

I have been velling about the strawberries for two years. It started one day when my wife came home from the grocery with a box of strawberries. Passing through the kitchen, I noticed them, and absently walked over and picked up one or two of them just to look at them, and then I proceeded to empty the whole box, examining the descending layers of berries. I knew, of course, that the berries on top would be the big, ripe, unblemished, juicy ones, and that the runts and lopsided and green and half rotten ones would occupy the lower levels.

So I said to my wife, 'Did you ever in your life buy a box of strawberries in which the berries underneath were as good, or even better, than the berries on top?' She laughed at me. "There was never," she said, "any such a box of strawberries."

"Then," I said, "you and all the other housewives of the nation know it, and accept it?"

"Why, sure."

"Don't you suppose," I went on, "that somewhere in our great republic there is a strawberry grower, a farmer, who is a good Christian, and has a conscience, and tries to be honest in his dealings with his fellow men—and puts the good strawberries on the bottom?"

"Almost all farmers," she said, "are Christians, but you expect too much. It just isn't done. It's been this way as long as I can remember. Everybody knows it."

"And everybody accepts it," I said "Everybody but me"

And I'm damn sore about it To my mind it is fraud, pure and simple, and one of these days I'm going to get up on my hind legs and organize a great popular movement of protest that will likely find its way into future histories of our country under the heading, The Great Strawberry Revolt (Omigod, the book's ruined! He's started on strawberries again!)



## POINT OF VIEW

Several hundred men and women commute daily from Mount Kisco and Chappaqua to New York and I have listened to a good many of them gripe about it They are enslaved by the alarm clock, an oppression from which I have escaped—temporarily

If I *had* to get up in the morning at, say, 6 45 or even 7 15 and scamper for a train, the welkin wouldn't contain my groans In as much as I don't have to do it, I often get up at 5 45 or 6 15

Now and then one or another of the commuters will say to me, "Brother, have you got it soft!" Naturally I have a tendency to strut my special position I actual' dislike to see a legal holiday come up on the calendar, and when one does come along, I find myself complaining, "Damn it, all those other bums don't have to get up and go to work today either!"

Came a day when I acquired a new slant on the matter I was talking to a neighbor who commutes each day and I said to him, with a certain smugness "I sure feel sorry for you Having 'o get out of the sack before seven o'clock, gulp your coffee, race for the station, ride that dirty old train all the way in to that dirty old city, slave all day, then ride that dirty old train all the way back out here"

He gave me a surprised look, elevating his eyebrows "My God!" he said "Do you mean to say you have to stay home all day every day with your wife!"

I think perhaps he had something there I had made a common error in failing to recognize the other fellow's point of view One person sees a thing one way, another sees it another way I remem-

ber years ago in Florida when I was lying on a beach with an attractive young lady beside me. I had on swimming trunks and I happened to notice that the young lady was looking at me rather curiously. Finally she gave a small giggle and said, "Boys sure have funny chests!" All I could think of, by way of answer, was, "Ye gods! Look who's talkin'."

It's all in the point of view.



## MINOR NEIGHBORS

Just recently I drove around a curve near my house and found a road agent blocking my path. He had a handkerchief over his face, but I recognized him as young Bruce Moss. His gun was leveled at me, but I honked him off to the side of the road and then pulled up even with him and stopped.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I'm a road agent."

"You getting much these days?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, are you getting much loot—much money?"

"No," he said sadly, "only cattle."

I gave him a dime and told him to stay on the job—that Mr. Buttolph would be along pretty soon carrying valuable treasure, maybe as much as twenty five cents.

"Thank you," said the road agent, and then added, "Mosey."

Over in Connecticut my young friend Timothy Matson, who also gets his western education from television, has taken to holding up the milkman and rustling dogs. I have observed him recently escaping from a posse, represented unwittingly by myself. He has a tendency, however, to get his television characters confused. He was standing in the driveway when I pulled up in my car.

"Law men!" he yelled. "Bang! Bang!" He took two quick shots at me and raced off across a big expanse of lawn, his hair pants flapping in the breeze. He made a left turn, went down a slope, skirted the vegetable garden, and got behind a big tree. Then his



head came slowly into view, and he uttered a shrill and defiant cry. "Ca-l-l-l-l Forrrrrr Ph-l-l-l-l-lp Mawrrrrrs!"



## TELEPORTATION

I was sitting on the stone wall opposite the garage when I happened to notice that the top of the wall was almost covered with an even sprinkling of a brown granular substance. I picked up a few of these tiny grains and examined them. I found that they crumbled under fairly strong pressure. But what were they? I walked up and down the wall and found that its top surface was uniformly sprinkled with them, and by getting on my hands and knees I was able to determine that they were scattered over the pavement. Obviously they had fallen from somewhere, rained on the premises. I looked up at the overhanging branches of the trees, and soon concluded that the brown substance came from somewhere else. I thought of Charles Fort and his theories about tele-  
portation—rains of strange objects on the earth. I walked over to another stone wall and, sure enough, this one, too, was covered. So I carefully picked up a dozen or so of the grains and sat down and studied them. There was an explanation but I couldn't seem to get it, and against my will I was beginning to think in Fortean and supernatural terms. At last I walked around to the kitchen door and summoned my college bred wife.

"Look at these little things," I said, extending my hand. She looked at them.

"Most amazing thing," I said. "It must have rained this stuff out of the sky. I've eliminated every other possibility—and I'm the guy who scoffed at Charles Fort."

"Where did you find it?" my wife asked.

"It's scattered all over the top of the stone walls out front."

She started laughing.

"You dope," she said, "that's grapes. Nothing but old grapes. I sprinkled it out there for the birds."



## SAWBUCK AND DIBBLE

I have several books on the fundamentals of carpentry, and a shed full of tools, but I have never undertaken anything in the way of a major construction job. The biggest thing I have built to date is a non usable sawbuck. In order to build a proper sawbuck it is necessary to mortise two of the crosspieces else the structure will collapse under a heavy burden. I got out one of the carpentry books and gave myself a lengthy briefing and then went to work. It took me two days to build the sawbuck, most of the time being spent on the mortises. They turned out satisfactory but the sawbuck didn't. I concentrated so hard on getting those mortises correct that I fumbled the over all dimensions of the thing. I built it much too low, so that a person trying to saw a log on it would have to bend far over and after ten minutes of sawing, would need a mortise in his sacroiliac. I still keep that sawbuck around, however, because if it gave me nothing else, it contributed a literary trifle. After I had driven the last nail into it, I stood off and sighed and then spoke of "the rigors of mortising."

The only other work in creative carpentry that I have attempted was the making of a dibble. A dibble is a gardening instrument used for poking a hole in the ground. I fashioned my dibble from an old broomstick, simply whittling a point on it. It has no metal tip, like dibbles you get in a store. I could have put such a tip on it, but my religion forbids the use of metal tips on dibbles.



## A TRAPPED TYCOON

There's a satchel pantsed millionaire who scurries around the streets of Mount Kisco carrying large baskets of eggs which he peddles to the local groceries. He came up here to live and decided to keep a few chickens. The chickens multiplied and he kept building more chicken houses and they got filled up and still he built

more Came the time when eggs were being produced on his place at the rate of machine gun fire He either couldn't get help or couldn't keep it, and he was trapped Not long ago I encountered him lugging his eggs through the depot plaza and he stopped to rest and I just stood there and laughed at him, and then asked him why, with all his money, he spent his days carrying eggs around. "It's this way," he said "When I started building chicken houses, all my friends and even my wife said I was crazy So I'd start another chicken house, and the more I added the more they told me I was a fool Then one day it dawned on me that I had about twenty five thousand bucks tied up in chicken houses And something had to be done about the eggs I couldn't go out and burn the chicken houses down and have done with them, I had to prove my point I had to prove that I had been right So what have I been doing for the last four years? Peddling eggs You need any?"



## THE GOOD EARTH

The deeprooted feeling that the plowman has for the good earth has been celebrated in prose and poetry for centuries A literary friend of mine who has a country place near by is a great reader of novels about the soil, and from those books he has acquired the notion that the spiritual relationship between the farmer and the field is a truly beautiful thing

Just recently this man heard tractor noises near his house and went out to investigate He found a man in overalls plowing a field adjoining his property My friend went out and hung on the fence and watched the plowing for a while, and noted with pleasure that the man riding the tractor had a genuine farmer look about him. After a time the farmer pulled up near my friend, shut off his engine, lit up a cigarette, and they started talking

"What you going to plant here?" asked my friend

"Couldn't say," responded the man on the tractor "Don't have any idea My job's to plow it, and then I've got to come back and harrow it, and after that I'm through I don't know what they're

gonna plant and I don't give a damn—all I gotta do is to get 'er plowed and harrowed."



## TREE WORSHIP

There was a Midwestern belief, bordering on superstition, that seems to have missed me. Midwesterners worship trees. I have frequent guests from the middle states and invariably I find that they venerate trees and that the cutting down of a tree is, to them, close to a mortal sin. I'll be walking around the premises with one of them, and I'll point to a tree and say, "Think I'll get the ax and take that damn tree out." They are horrified. They react as if I'd said, "Think I'll get the ax, since it's a nice day, and do away with my wife and kids." They tell me that I should never, never, never cut down a tree. Some of them will concede that it's all right to take out saplings, provided the saplings are interfering with the growth of bigger trees, but even then they have to turn their heads away when the sapling falls.

Easterners hold no such deep seated respect for trees. If a tree is in the way, or doesn't please its owner, chop it the hell down. And that's the way I am. When Hoosiers or Buckeyes or Suckers or Pukes come to my house and abuse me because I cut down trees, I defend my actions as best I can. I state the case for the prosecution. Trees are all right, but, like people, they have plenty of bad points. Think of the god awful poetry that has been written about them!

Sometimes I come up against an antagonist who venerates trees because they produce wood for the building of homes.

"So what?" I demand. "What's so good about lumber? It rots, and if it doesn't rot it swells when it shouldn't be swelling, and contracts when it shouldn't be contracting, and it attracts termites, and soaks up paint, and if it doesn't soak up paint it fights paint. It dries out and catches fire from a mere spark and burns up everything a man has, including himself and his family."

When I bought this property there were several trees that had grown up to obliterate large sections of The View. Here we had this

magnificent vista, a site which Gustave Sigriz had chosen because of the splendid view, and here were these trees, blocking it off. When I announced that I was going to chop them down, I met with impassioned opposition. Granted, the view was important, but never, never, never cut down a beautiful tree I cut 'em down.

One hard-headed Missourian, Herb Simpson, kept abusing me about my cruelty to trees for so long that I finally backed him into a corner and said, "Just what is it about a tree that makes you all but fall on your knees before it? What's so all-fired wonderful about a tree?"

"Well," he said, "well, I don't know, but . . . well, for one thing, think of all the years it takes to produce a big tree—think of how old they are. A thing as old as a big tree—you just can't go out and take an ax and chop it down."

I walked across the driveway to the rock garden and poked around in it and came up with a stone about the size of a hen's egg. I showed it to Herb, the tree worshiper.

"What's this?" I said.

"A rock."

"You want it?"

"What the hell do I want with a rock?"

"Listen," I said. "If you saw this little rock in the front yard, you'd pick it up and throw it as far as you could, to get rid of it. Let me tell you something, tree-lover. This little rock is chiefly gneiss and mica-schist, and dates back to the Silurian Age. This little rock is millions and millions of years old, and once there were probably spine-bearing brachiopods perched on it, and uniserial scandent graptolites. If it's old things you want, then take this little rock. Here—you can have it. A gift from me. Take it home with you. Build a shrine around it. Get on your knees and pray to it."

That brilliant exposition got nowhere. He wouldn't yield an eighth of an inch in his veneration for trees. I gave up. As Lum Edwards sometimes says, might as well try to argue with a stump on farr.

The most talked-about tree on my premises is a Japanese flowering cherry—the same model, I believe, that they have in Washing-

ton for tourists to look at. Our specimen stands beside the terrace, just outside the kitchen door, and my wife often points it out to visitors and talks about it before she even points out me. She venerates it, and women generally enjoy talking about it, and emphasis is always placed on its brief period of blooming. Around the first of May it lets itself out and becomes one huge bouquet of pink blossoms. And how long do the blossoms last? A week or less. The rest of the time that tree is an eyesore and a nuisance. In the first place it is ugly. It attracts tent caterpillars. And during the summer I can walk over to it, take hold of it, give it a good shake, and watch a hundred and eighty-five thousand Japanese beetles fly out of it. Two or three times I have suggested that I'd like to rip it out. Such ructions! You'd think I'd just proposed going down and shooting the paymaster at Doubleday & Company. I try to bring reason and logic to bear on the matter, pointing out that the pink blossoms exist for only a few days, and what's the sense of keeping a thing around all year just for one week of pleasure? But the opposition argues that the one week of beauty is worth it. Privately, I still disagree. Suppose you had a woman around your place—a woman who looked exactly like Ingrid Bergman for one week in the year and exactly like Elsa Maxwell for the remaining fifty-one weeks. Would you consider it worth while keeping her around? Oh, you would? Well, then, you missed my point. I mean just to look at.



## HOW TO DO EVERYTHING

There are few problems in life that cannot be solved through the use of books. If you are clumsy at splicing high-tension wires, there's a book somewhere that will improve your technique. And if love-making strikes you as a pleasant or profitable hobby, there's a mattress manual called *Ideal Marriage* that will set you to whinnying and, if you're not careful, bounding off through the woods waving four yards of gauze at the nuthatches.

One small book catalogue requires but a brief run-through to reveal literature that will teach you the art of rapid reading, how to

have enduring passion, best methods of pickling watermelon rind, how to organize your brains, nerves, and stomach into one smooth-working unit insuring a longer and happier life, the secrets of jujitsu, how to live in Alaska, and the best way of managing the feet in bowling. In the lists of self-help books there are many volumes dealing with languages, nervous disorders, dog culture, eyesight, and etiquette. I find books which will teach you to write, to think on your feet, to understand opera without going to it, to be a successful business girl provided you are a girl, to make your child attractive, to run a club meeting under parliamentary rules, sixteen different ways to tell fortunes, to understand electricity, tell jokes, nurse people, have big fun, make bookends, preach a sermon, make and trim your own hats, play cribbage, hang a flag properly, sober up, grow guppies, fix a Diesel engine, spot aircraft, read blueprints, play the piano without a piano, achieve world peace, measure things, dive, climb a mountain, conjugate French verbs, sue an enemy, run a store, behave yourself in college, recognize snakes, speak Dutch, compute hog prices, recite poetry, hit homers, perform cowboy dances, hitch up a goat, have a baby, act, believe in angels, play the electric organ, make smoke signals, stuff animals, identify common rocks, pitch horseshoes, read palms, and say grace before meals a different way every day in the year.

I have seen almost all of these books together in one place—in the home of Doc Rockwell overlooking Townsend Gut in Maine. Doc is, I believe, the world's foremost collector of how-to books. If the whim came upon him (and it might) to build and operate a grist mill, he has a book that tells him how to go about it. What's more important, he has read it, even though the passion to become a grist-mill proprietor has never so much as brushed him. If you encountered him on the road and told him that you wanted to build a grist mill and operate it and that you knew nothing of how to go about it, Doc would take you by the hand and lead you to a spot in the shade and set you down and say, "Now. To begin with . . ." and he'd lead you through the entire project specification by specification; and in the telling he'd make the building and operation of a grist mill sound like the ultimate flowering of man's

genius. He cannot play the violin because he's never tried, but he knows how.



## IS CONVERSATION DYING?

Recently I was lured away from my hearth for an informal gathering of civilized people at a large house in Connecticut. Among those present was Dick Mealand, author of the novel called *Let Me Do the Talking*. There was never a happier wedding of author and title in the history of bookwriting, for Mr. Mealand loves to talk. He and I got to arguing about television. I was enthusiastically in favor of it, and he was as enthusiastically against it. It was his contention that television would destroy one of the most amiable pursuits of intelligent humans—conversation. I let Mealand do the talking, and he waved his arm over the room and said, "If we had a television set going here tonight, and were watching a stupid ball game, then all this fine talk would be lost."

I couldn't handle him polemically, so I took note of the civilized conversation that went on in the room during the next hour or so.

One woman was telling a man that she plays better ping-pong with her shoes removed.

An author who said he once played semi-pro baseball voiced the opinion that in organized baseball some players have the will to win while others don't.

Three women were on a divan discussing, in shrill tones, the physiology of the tipped womb.

There was a spirited discussion about what an abalone steak (a) looks like and (b) tastes like.

Someone was talked into telling a funny story about a father who took his four-year-old child into an Irish saloon. The father saw a friend standing at the bar, and said to the child, "Say hello to the mon." The child said, "Hello, mon"

I told a story about how it was past my bedtime and I was going home, which I did. Let me do the sleeping.

Anti-social? Certainly I'm anti-social, by the formalized standards



of etiquette. But those standards need some drastic overhauling, and if I can stay awake long enough, I'm going to revise the code. If somebody calls me up and invites me to dinner, the first question I ask is, "What you having?" And the second question is, "Who else is gonna be there?" Those are sensible questions, no matter how severely they would shock Mrs Post



### A GOOD ADDRESS

One day I asked a neighbor why she invariably tells people she lives in Chappaqua

"It's a much better address," she said

"How do you mean?"

"Well," she said "it's more refined Mount Kisco is all full of wops"

Since that conversation I have consistently classified myself as a resident of Mount Kisco. Actually our road is neither in Mount Kisco nor in Chappaqua

Disregarding the lady's crack about wops I dislike the notion of placing that much emphasis on "a good address." That woman, I suspect, doesn't want to die in an automobile accident but I imagine that if she ever thinks of such an end for herself she hopes that the crash occurs on a "good" highway with a fashionable-sounding name. She may visualize the newspaper stories of her tragic death, and she shudders at the thought of those stories saying she was killed on, say, Route 129, when it would have sounded so much nicer, so much more genteel, if her skull had been cracked on the Saw Mill River Parkway



### WESTCHESTER SPEECH

It needs explaining that in their childhood, most residents of North Westchester lived among their hills almost as remote from the metropolis as Chillicothe. During their lifetime they had wit-

nessed the suburban expansion of the city beating ever outward in ten-year waves, sloshing over the sylvan townships of New Castle and Bedford, bringing with it the culture of the dry martini to clash with the culture of the dipper of applejack. Yet the natives have managed to hold onto many of their own customs and traditions, including certain habits of speech. Noteworthy among their speech mannerisms is the peculiar thing they do with the prepositions "in" and "out." They say, for example, that your coffee already has sugar *into* it; that a Christmas tree has tinsel *onto* it; that the engine of your station wagon has sludge *into* it; that the corncrib has mice *into* it; that a person's nose has a pimple *onto* it; that they once saw a show called *Three Men Onto a Horse* or borrowed the book *Larks Into the Popcorn*. An ancient inhabitant, following the trade of handy man, was called upon recently to build a rude fence in a hurry to keep a cow from violating a spinach bed. When he had finished with it he stood off and looked at it and remarked, "It may not be so purty for nice, but it sure is hell for strong."



#### WIFE VS. THERMOSTAT

My wife lacks the scientific attitude. She is extraordinarily bright about many things (washing socks, for example), but she cannot comprehend the workings of a thermostat. For five years I have been trying to explain the function of this little instrument to her. She insists that she knows as much about it as I do—but she doesn't. Apparently she cannot rid her subconscious mind of the notion that its operation has something to do with the temperature outdoors.

Suppose the temperature outdoors is thirty degrees. I have the thermostat set at seventy. The sun comes out, and the thermometer outside the kitchen door begins to rise. Maybe it gets up to fifty degrees. If I don't keep an eye on her she'll go to that thermostat and wheel it down to, say, sixty. And when the deed is discovered she argues, "But it's real warm outside!"

"The hell with what it is outside!" I howl. "It's what it is inside that counts. What it is outside has nothing whatever to do with what it is inside; it's what it is inside, it's what it is where the——"

"I wish you could hear yourself," she says

This has been going on, as I said, for five years. At times I have forbidden her ever to touch the thermostat, but that does no good. It has become a thing of fascination to her. I'm sure she believes that she is right and I am wrong. Once I enlisted the aid of my son, a great scientist, in an attempt to clarify the workings of that little gadget so that she would be able to understand it. He gave up in ten minutes. I should have known he wouldn't succeed. After four years of studious application in the field of chemical engineering he came home from college and told me proudly that he knew a cure for warts. Hypnotism, he said. A wart, he explained, can be hypnotized off by the person having the wart. If you don't already know it you should see what it costs to put a boy through college these days!



**MAN'S BEST FRIENDS**





## BEES AT THE BAR

If you work on a newspaper you've got to make up your mind that you'll write feelingly about animals. The tradition is too strong to be conquered. All city-room traditions are, in fact, difficult to upset. For the last five years I have been crying to get "stink bomb" past the copy desk. I write it "stink bomb," and it comes out in the paper as "stench bomb." I have squawked and bellyached about it, but to no avail. I once went so far as to confront my boss and demand to know if he had ever heard of anyone going out and getting stenching drunk. I got nowhere.

Among animal stories an old stand-by is the cat trapped in the wall. Any time a Manhattan cat gets trapped in a wall and the police and firemen turn out to rescue her she is certain to get as much page-one space as the multitudes of old beggar ladies who are found dead in tenement hallways with ninety thousand dollars pinned in their petticoats.

Having long been of the opinion that it would be a wonderful thing for all cats to be trapped in walls and left there, I have always had a difficult time of it writing a cute, heart-rending story about such little tragedies. Dogs that stand howling beside their dead masters bore me. Horses that get their fannies caught in manholes give me an elaborate pain. And the greatest sin in journalism is the interview with an animal. These things still pop up in the metropolitan press, and I am happy to report that most of the newspapermen I know join me in vomiting as we read them.

Insect stories are all right. Nobody expects you to get sentimental about bugs. Not long ago a swarm of bees got loose on Sixth Avenue and covered the front of a saloon near Rockefeller Center.

Our paper sent a young man to gather a thoroughgoing report on this phenomenon. He was a native New Yorker, and here was something completely outside his experience. At last he telephoned, and I got the job of taking the story from him.

"I'm phoning from across the street," he said. "I can see these bastards all over the front of the saloon. There must be a couple million of them."

"What's the name of the saloon?" I asked him.

"Well," he said, "I can't tell you that. These bees have got the name covered up so I can't read it, and I don't want to go over there and ask."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Hell," he said, "I understand they bite!"



## RUFUS

One day I read a classified ad in a Mount Kisco newspaper, an ad that was confusing in its terminology. After studying it for quite a while I concluded that it meant that a man named Paul Ganz was giving away cocker spaniels. He lived over in Yorktown and when I telephoned him and asked him if it was true, he said it certainly was not true. What the ad meant was that he had some girl dogs (the word he used!) that he wanted to stash around at different homes, and they really wouldn't belong to the people who kept them, and occasionally Mr. Ganz would come around with boy dogs, and then something would happen which I never did quite understand, and that's all there was to it, except that there was some mention of puppies. This didn't sound good to me—I said I just wanted to buy a dog, not run a whore house, and Mr. Ganz said he would sell me a dog for fifty dollars. I said my God I could buy a congressman for fifty dollars, and he said not with a pedigree, and in the end I said I'd take one. So he drove over one evening, walked into the house, reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a little black ball and set it on the floor and it promptly peed on the carpet. A few days later he sent me a certificate of



pedigree—a thing I don't even have for myself. I didn't like the looks of that pedigree. The dogs involved in the production of Rufus all seemed to be close relatives—first cousins and uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters—and the more I studied the thing the more I thought that I might have an idiot dog on my hands. Rufus is what is known as a My Own Brucie dog. Of his eight great-grandparents, two were My Own Brucie—the same fellow both times—and one was My Own Miss Brucie, and one was Blackstone Brucie, and one was My Own Old Lace, and one was My Own Clear Doubt Kinfolks. Close knit. Clannish. Carrying on under the same roof. Then one of the grandfathers named Pooh-Bah of Angelfear romanced My Own Clear Doubt and to this union was born Rustum of Angelfear, and Rustum of Angelfear fell in love with Rebel Beauty of Angelfear (could they have been brother and sister?) and they begat Rufus, and Rufus peed on the carpet. His real name is Black Rebel of Mount Kisco, but he doesn't know it.

A dog that has My Own Brucie for a great grandfather, twice yet, has something to be proud about, but I don't think Rufus ever gives the matter any thought. He's as common as dirt. He doesn't act superior and is against nothing and eats sticks. It took a long time to get him housebroken. Bluebloods are harder to train in this respect than ordinary dogs, whether this applies to people is a thing I wouldn't know. After we did get him housebroken, it turned out that he was broken to only one house. Whenever he gets into a house other than our own, the first thing he looks for is a piano, and if he doesn't find a piano, he uses people. One evening, when he was still a puppy, we had company in and among the guests was a lady who is widely regarded as proper. She was standing by the fireplace with a martini in her hand, gassing about Henry James, when her left foot began to feel warm. She took a sip of her drink and then glanced down at her foot and Rufus was there, just finishing up a great job of work. He had filled her shoe but there was a saving circumstance. She had on open-toed shoes, and it all ran down and out through the vent in the front. This is the only

time I ever saw an application of the practical value of open-toed shoes.



## MULES OVER MEN

In every little Arkansas town there is usually a group of men who loaf together on the main street, passing judgment on the world about them. These men appear to look upon mules as being more important than humans. They'll be sitting in front of a store when a team of mules comes in view, pulling a wagon. There'll be a man on the wagon, but they don't care about him. They're interested in those mules.

"That off mule yonder," one of them will say, "that's the same mule that Old Man Wivvett got from the Widder Binks when she moved to Oklahoma, and then give to Ortho Hackenstaff when Ortho married up with Sairy Wivvett."

"Yer dead wrong," says another. "That ain't the one. That off mule come from the county seat two and a half year ago, bought at auction by Caleb Bogle and the first week kicked his hard man and broke his laig in two places."

They'll argue the matter heatedly until the team draws closer and the mule in question is definitely identified as the one Old Man Wivvett "give" to Ortho Hackenstaff. Whereupon the man who had been correct in his identification would slap his thigh and say:

"I knowed I knowed 'er!"



## A BEAT DOG

The small-town man of Arkansas places great stock in his knowledge of animals and their ways. Norris Goff tells of the time Ezra Seestrunk got lost in the woods, far from town. Ezra had his dog with him and after hours of wandering hit upon a scheme for finding his way back to town. He cut himself a switch from a tree and began to whip the dog. The dog lit out through the woods, running

about half a mile, then stopping to wait for Ezra. When Ezra would catch up, he'd beat the dog some more with the switch and the animal would run another half mile. Before long Ezra and dog were home. "A beat dog," said Ezra, "will head fer home ever' time."



## BUTCH AND THE LARK

Whenever possible the Blairs take Butch with them on out-of-town trips. Once they went to San Francisco, engaging a bedroom on The Lark, a train which is customarily greeted in the Los Angeles station by shouts from railroad workers who cry, "Hark! Hark! The Lark!"

The Blairs got Butch into the bedroom without difficulty but from then on there were unpleasant developments. Butch has a habit of exposing his fangs and snarling, presenting a prospect that would frighten the late Albert Payson Terhune. Moreover, Butch is suspicious of anybody in a uniform. The conductor who came for the tickets was the first victim of this suspicion, and the transaction finally had to be consummated under the door. White-jacketed waiters all but got their heads torn off whenever they tried to bring Mr. Blair's bourbon, and they ended up by refusing to serve him. During the night Butch spent all his time trying to climb into the upper berth where his master was losing sleep. The dog barked and howled and screamed, and the other passengers pounded on the walls, yelled their protests, and complained bitterly to the train officials.

At last they reached San Francisco. Mr. Blair got Butch off the train and started down the platform. He encountered the conductor and, with the intention of placating that gentleman, said:

"Butch didn't behave himself very well on the trip, did he? I hope he doesn't act up like that on the return trip."

"Are you taking him back to L. A.?" asked the conductor.

"My wife is," said Mr. Blair. "Going back next week—on The Lark."

"Oh no, he's not," said the conductor. "That dog is never going

anywhere again on The Lark. That dog made this run a hell on earth and I intend to say as much in my report. You'll not get him on The Lark, or on any other trains belonging to this company."

"We'll see," said Mr. Blair abruptly. He is a man who loves nothing more than to find an obstacle that needs surmounting.

Yet the conductor's mandate gave him some worry. He planned to remain in San Francisco awhile and Mrs. Blair was to return with Butch. Mr. Blair was determined that Butch should ride The Lark back to Hollywood.

He went out and bought a pair of dark glasses. Then he bought a Seeing Eye dog harness.

He took Mrs. Blair and Butch to the station. Mrs. Blair had on the dark glasses and Butch, wearing the harness, was supposed to be impersonating a Seeing Eye dog. He did all right until they got through the ticket gate. The moment he reached the platform and saw the train he went into rebellion. He wanted nothing whatever to do with that iron monster. He started growling, flopped down on his belly, and refused to move another inch.

By good fortune another conductor was in charge of the train, else the plot would have died right then. In any event, passengers and trainmen were treated to a unique spectacle.

Down the platform came a blind woman, dragging her Seeing Eye dog along the concrete. Over the stubborn dog stood a man, cursing the animal fluently. The blind woman dragged that dog all the way down the platform and then the man spent ten minutes wrestling with the animal, boosting him into the vestibule of the car.

In spite of Butch's rebellious performance, they got away with it.



## A HORSE'S THOUGHTS

What does a race horse think about? Does he know he's in a horse race when he's in one? Does he know that he's the favorite? When he turns around and looks at the mob of people, does he know they are people? I don't suppose a horse gives much thought

to people except when they come around bearing oats. Maybe a horse looks at all those people and considers them to be nothing more than a bunch of handles that sometimes have oats on the end of them and otherwise are of no use on earth.

I've asked any number of turf experts if a horse knows he's in a race and they all say he does. I don't believe it. Watch the horses when they come up to the gate with a minute to go before they start the contest. If they knew they were going to run a race they'd be looking each other over. They'd be peering around the gate for a gander at the track, deciding on strategical maneuvers. They'd snap their hooves to freshen circulation.



## SMART DOG

A city editor of my acquaintance, a man who would swiftly throw out a story reporting the end of the war if it were necessary to get a story about a dog on Page One, was talking to me one day about the intelligence of dogs.

"A dog," he said, "is just naturally smart. Knows how to figure things out. I remember one day when I was at the dog races in Florida. You know how the mechanical rabbit runs around the edge of the track and the dogs race after it. Well, there was one dog that finally figured the thing out. He had been coming out of the box time after time, maybe hundreds of times, and chasing after that rabbit and never catching it. Then he got smart. He reasoned the thing out in his head. The day I was there he came out of the box with the rest of the pack. All the others lit off down the track after the rabbit. Not this dog. He slowed down, hopped over the fence, raced across the infield, jumped the other fence, and got into the back stretch. That dog had it figured out that the way to nab the rabbit was to take the short cut and head it off. He was in the back stretch before the rabbit ever came around the bend. I tell you, a dog is a smart animal."

"Did he get the rabbit?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "that's the sad part. The rabbit is mounted on

an iron hoot nanny that sticks out from the rail. There stood the dog, waiting. The rabbit came charging down the line. The dog watched it, standing tense. When the rabbit was about fifteen feet from him, that dog lunged through the air to meet it. Broke his neck."

A sad story, all right. That city editor has always been a man capable of recognizing smartness at a glance, whether in man or beast.



### THE REASON FOR FLIES

One of the loafers in the barber shop sat with a fly swatter in his hand and now and then he'd slap a fly off his knee.

"'y god," said the fly killer, "I can understand why God made almost everything in the world, but what the hell did he have in his mind when he created a dirty no-good fly?"

The barber lifted the razor off my face and turned to stare for a moment at the fly killer. He shook his head from side to side.

"Birch," he said, "that is the dumbest remark I ever heard passed in my life. God had a reason to create flies, and a good reason to boot. Why, man alive, if it wasn't fer flies this country would be fulla unemployment. They'd be bread lines a mile long in the cities and chillren would be starvin' to death. Now look at it this way, Birch. If we didn't have no flies, they wouldn't be no fly-swatter factories, no flypaper factories, no Flit-gun factories, no factories where they make winder screens, and I don't know what all. Think about all the men that wouldn't have no jobs if all them factories wasn't runnin', and they wouldn't be runnin' if it wasn't for flies. Right?"

This economic theory was not altogether convincing to the man who had originally challenged the wisdom of fly creation.

"You mean to stand there and tell me," he spoke up boldly, "that when God created flies he had it in mind that someday they would be fly-swatter factories and so on, and give a lot of people work, and solve the unemployment problem?"

"That's what I said," affirmed the barber, "and I'm speakin' from a stand point." The discussion was closed.



## THE ANTELOPE

Back in South Dakota someone told me that an antelope has an unusual behind. The rump of the antelope is white and in ordinary circumstances nice-looking, if you go for rumps. Under excitement, however, the antelope's bottom expands to twice its normal size. Let a hunter come over a hill and swoosh! the antelope's behind explodes outward in all directions, and away he goes. This mechanism was arranged by Nature; the expanded rump is a flag of warning to other antelope, telling them to floss out their own and start running.

At first I thought a little sadly on the fact that Nature hadn't given human beings this same characteristic. Actually I wouldn't want to have such a thing happening to me, much as I would enjoy seeing it on other people. Suppose under fear or excitement our posteriors flared out to twice their normal size. I know some people it would knock to the ground. We'd all have to wear rubber pants. The close-fitting cha. would go out of fashion, else there would be occasions even at polite gatherings where the room would be full of flying chair rungs. Maybe it's just as well that this function is confined to the antelope.



## HOW TO KILL A WASP

I didn't pay much attention to the wasps until Mr. Buttolph planted wasp-fright in my mind. He said that next to a snake a wasp is the orneriest thing alive. He said that one day a wasp stung him on the back of his neck and almost instantaneously his tongue began to swell up and got so big that it was forcing his mouth open and, at the same time, he broke out in a terrible rash from head to foot, and had to go to the hospital. A wasp, he said, has been known

to kill a human. And he cautioned me about my behavior around them. Don't underestimate their intelligence, he said. Don't run from them or they'll nail you for certain. He was running from the one that got him on the back of the neck. The thing to do is to deceive them, pretend you don't even suspect that they're around. Generally speaking, he said, they won't bother you if they think you are ignorant. When one of them gets in the house, don't make the mistake of being hasty.

"Don't ever think," Mr. Buttolph explained, "that you can handle a wasp the way you handle a fly. You've got to plan a campaign—figure out just exactly how you're going to proceed against him, and hope he doesn't get you while you're mapping your plans. Keep your eye on him, but don't let him know you're looking at him. Quietly assemble your equipment. A rubber fly swatter. Thick gloves. Put a hat on. Turn your shirt collar up and button it. Keep a ball peen hammer handy. Then go after him—but don't go directly at him. Sidle up to him. Pretend you're just walking in his direction by accident. Say something to throw him off guard, like, 'Now, I wonder what I did with those glasses.' Watch him out of the corner of your eye, and if he starts to wiggle or flap his legs, ease away from him, back off, and wait awhile. Give him a chance to settle down. Go outdoors and practice with the rubber swatter. Drive a tack in the wall and stand off and swat at it—develop your aim, because that's important. God help you if you ever swing at a wasp and miss him. Now, go back in and locate him again and see what sort of a mood he's in. If he's at ease, sidle up to him and when you're sure of your position, when you're certain that you've got the proper range, bust him one as hard as you can. If he falls to the floor, jump on him, stomp him—even then he may get up off the floor and stab you. Hit him with the hammer. Don't take your eye off him. No matter that he's lying there like a corpse. He may be playing possum. Get a newspaper and wrap him up in it, and then set fire to it. After that it may be that he won't bother you again."





## NAME OF A MULE

On another day I was approaching the home of Noel Houston in one of the Confederate states when I came upon a lean Negro, cast in the mold of Stepin Fetchit, standing beside a mule that was hitched to an old wagon. I stopped to talk.

"That your mule?" I asked him.

"Yassuh."

"How old is he?"

"He about sebm years old."

"How long you had him?"

"I had 'im a long time."

"What's his name?"

"Well, suh," he replied uncertainly, "I don't know his name, but I calls him Bill."



## DOG-SITTER

During the years when I lived in New York City the mere mention of dogs aroused a fury in me, but now I have to confess that I am dog-daffy, and often talk baby talk to Rufus, and am tolerant of people who make incontestable idiots of themselves over their dogs. One day I went to a party at the home of a neighbor and the last guests to arrive were a man and wife who lived on the other side of Mount Kisco. The man was a prominent manufacturer, depressingly wealthy, and looked to be around sixty. He apologized to the host for being late. "We had trouble," he said, "getting a sitter." Naturally I assumed that he was talking about a baby-sitter and that he had something in the way of a grandchild around his house, but as the talk went along it developed that the sitter he had trouble getting was a sitter for his dog. Later on I jockeyed myself into a position where I could talk to him, and learned that he and his wife never left their dog alone—always hired a sitter. They had

other servants, but the regular help objected to sitting with the dog, it being required that the sitter stay in the dog's presence every moment that the master and the mistress were away from home. This situation acquired added novelty, I thought, from the fact that the dog was an Irish setter. Thus the person engaged to keep him company would be known as a setter sitter, or a sitter with a setter.

# THE SPORTING LIFE





## SPORTS WRITING

A few years ago a third-rate British novelist, visiting in America, told an interviewer that the finest writing being produced in the United States may be found on the sports pages. That was a hell of a thing to say. His declaration was given wide publicity, especially by sports writers. It didn't make them any easier to live with and, if I may be permitted a critical observation, it wasn't true.

The ineptitude of sports writers has for a long time been a great puzzle to me. Day by day they have traffic with the most amazing people on the face of the globe. And day by day they write about those people in labored, uninspired and uninspiring prose. They never unbend until such an obvious nut as Tony Galento comes along and then, instead of permitting the man's own colossal japery to speak for itself, they spend most of their efforts contriving trick names for him, e.g., the Human Beer Barrel. They had him all the time, yet it remained for Joe Mitchell to write the proper kind of story about him, just as it remained for Morris Gilbert to whack out a prose masterpiece on Kid McCoy and for Floyd Taylor to write brilliant interviews with Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb. It even took the radio to acquaint the public adequately with that amazing personality, Moe Berg.

Some of the sports writers are superb—Dan Parker, Joe Williams, Bob Considine, Tom O'Reilly, to name a few. But most of them grind out dreary stuff for the simple reason that they are lousy, unimaginative writers.

On the night that Max Baer knocked out Primo Carnera (the Ambling Alp; the Varicose Venetian, etc.) at Madison Square Garden Bowl I was in Carnera's dressing room immediately after

the battle. Half a dozen sports writers were there too. The seconds brought the felled ox in, leading him by both arms because he had the stumbles. He was a sight to behold.

You may remember that Mr. Baer struck Mr. Carnera with great force and great frequency about the face and head. When the Italian giant reached the dressing room, he had large lumps all over his forehead, and his jaws were swollen. They took his ring clothes off and propped him up on a rubbing table, and he kept looking around the room without apparently seeing anything. His handlers faded back and left him sitting there beneath the light. Nobody made a move to do anything, so I stepped up to him.

"Did he hit you hard?" I asked him

He stared at me a full minute. Then his lips moved.

"Holy Jesus!" he said

"Do you want to fight him again?"

"Holy Jesus!" mumbled Carnera

"Do you think you could lick him if you fought him again?"

"Holy Jesus!"

"Does your head hurt?"

"Holy Jesus!"

"Do you think Baer can lick Schmeling?"

"Holy Jesus!"

At this point half a dozen or so of Carnera's proprietors came crashing in, and the press was ordered out of the place. I was well satisfied. It was one of the most revealing interviews I had ever had. I was quite startled, however, the next day when I picked up the papers to see what the sports writers had to say about it. One of them quoted Carnera as having said

"Max's blows were very hard. He hurt me several times—I'll have to admit that. But I sincerely believe that I could defeat him and I would like to have another chance. I want to regain the championship."

Carnera couldn't have uttered those thirty-eight words in that sequence if he had gone four years to Harvard. Yet the other sports writers had composed the same sort of sheep-dip with slight variations.

This example is not an unusual one. I have seen it work out in the same direction several times and I don't get around the sports crowd very often. It always irritates me to read how some Ozarkian hillbilly who happens to have a good pitching arm has said: "I feel that our hurling strength this season will carry us through to the pennant and that we shall capture the World Series with no great difficulty."



## MR. AMERICA

When the A.A.U. weight-lifting championships are held in New York the sports writers pay small heed to the contests. They list the events and the winners in agate type and let it go at that. They don't call any of the big-muscle men to one side and talk to them about life and love. They should.

I went to see one of the strong men a couple of days after he had been designated as Mr. America at Madison Square Garden. He was waiting for me in a tiny office at Sigmund Klein's gymnasium, a few steps away from Times Square. His other name is John C. Grimek.

Mr. Grimek is built like a brick smokehouse. He weighs two hundred pounds, although he is only five feet, nine inches high. His shoulders are of such an amplitude that he generally goes side-wise through a door. He was born in Perth Amboy but he now makes his home in York, Pa., which is the town of professional strong men. He is an associate editor of *Strength and Health*, a magazine published in York, and he works for the York Barbell Company, which produces the things weight lifters lift.

Mr. Grimek is shy in the presence of an interviewer but once he gets to talking he uses big words and speaks with the formal accents of a radio preacher.

"Our magazine," he said, "has a circulation of, no doubt, ninety-five thousand, although it was recently banded in Canada. I do not know why it was banded, but it was. No doubt it is concerning this war they are having in Europe. Oh, come in, Steve."

Another pair of huge shoulders came sidewise through the door.

"This is Steve Stanko," said Mr. Grimek "He is my friend. He won the championship at the Garden, if you read. He did the two-arm military press, the two-arm snatch and the clean and jerk. He holds the world's record for snatch and clean and jerk "

He looked it, too, this Steve Stanko He appeared to be more at ease than Mr America

"Mr. Stanko also comes from Perth Amboy," explained Mr. Grimek "He is about six years younger than I We travel all over the country together and have some great lurks together."

"Are you married?" I asked Mr America

"No," he said, "I am not married I have an annulment however. An unfortunate heart affair when I was at Illinois University. I had a scholarship at Illinois to be on the gym team I was there two semesters and I took some courses I took a course in physical education "

"What nationality are you?" I asked

"Well," he said, "I cannot properly state I am a conglomeration of half breeds That is the best I can tell you "

I asked Mr Grimek if during his travels he sometimes encounters men who adopt a sneering attitude toward him because of his remarkable physique

"Yes," he replied "People seem to have the opinion that we are bound "

"Bound?" I repeated

"I mean by that muscle bound There is no such thing as muscle-boundedness They get me angry sometimes, and I speak harsh. They say, Let me see you scratch back of your shoulders' That means that if I cannot scratch back of my shoulders I am bound. But I say, 'No Why should I? I have no bite back of my shoulders, so why should I scratch where I have no bite?' That usually puts a halt "

"That's right," put in Mr Stanko There is no such thing as muscle-bound We have never in our lives seen anybody that was muscle-bound We could scratch back of our shoulders from morning to night if we wanted to but we don't want to."



I asked Mr. America about his casual relations with the opposite sex, whether his designation as Mr. America would affect those relations.

"Do you go for the girls?" I asked.

"Does he go for the girls!" cried Mr. Stanko. "And does the girls go for him! Oh, boy! He has got girls scattered all over this land. He has got——"

"Now, Steve," Mr. America cautioned him, "stop it, or I'll put you down."

"And he likes the 'ump' girl," continued Mr. Stanko, unafraid of being put down "That's Ann Sheridan. He likes her because he says she's got Indian blood in 'er He likes Indian blood."

"Please," said Mr. America "To get back to muscle-boundedness. We give exhibitions of flexibility We do splits and back bends to more or less eradicate that stiffness they think we are associated with. We are not bound "



## THE FIRST CURVE

During the last couple of years I managed to work myself into a mild lather over a baseball controversy, to wit. Is there such a thing as a curve ball?

As I recall it, the argument started with a piece in the *New Yorker* magazine. An old baseball scout let loose "the secret." He said that there was no such thing as a curve and that everybody in baseball knew it. He added that the secret had been guarded because the fans would lose interest if word got out that Cooper and Feller and Hubbell and Higbe were incapable of throwing anything but a straight ball.

Newspapers took up the argument and I remember hearing Waite Hoyt broadcast a vigorous denunciation of the no-curve theory. Hoyt is called "Hurt" in Brooklyn. Once when he was struck by a pitched ball, a fan cried, "Holy Jeez! Hurt's Hoyt!" Well, Hoyt was bitter about the curve-ball argument, but don't

forget he was once a big-league pitcher, and a pitcher would be the last person on earth to admit a pitcher can't throw a curve.

*Life* magazine assigned a high-speed photographer to investigate the dispute. He came away with a series of pictures showing the flight of baseballs pitched by Carl Hubbell and Cy Blanton. All these photographs failed to show the existence of a curve.

It soon developed that the curve question was an old one and that various tests had been made in the past. Baseballs had been thrown through a series of hoops covered with thin paper, to show that they curved. Tall stakes had been driven along base lines and pitchers had thrown balls that curved out and in and in and out. Yet, to my knowledge, the argument was never clearly settled to the satisfaction of all concerned. Personally, being a skeptic, I'm on the no-curve side.

My specific interest in having a decision made is minor. In my files I have a notation concerning "the first deliberate curve ever pitched in baseball." This historic event occurred, according to the memorandum, back in 1866 and in Brooklyn. The pitcher was a gentleman named Arthur Cummings, who played with the Brooklyn Excelsiors.

Mr. Cummings' performance that day back in 1866 has interested me for a long time. It gives me something to speculate on when I have nothing else to occupy my mind. I've often tried to reconstruct the scene where Mr. Cummings pitched the first deliberate curve in all history.

*How did he happen to make up his mind to do it?*

Let's visualize Mr. Cummings out there on the mound. Let's assume the Excelsiors were trailing. Mr. Cummings, as the saying goes, was in the clutch. What did he do?

"Well," he may have said to himself, "I reckon I'll have to try something new on these bums. Lemmy see, now. Mebby if I threw a ball down there and made it sorta curve on the way, then they couldn't hit it. Yep. That's what I'll do. Wonder how a feller oughta fix his fingers to make a ball curve. This way—this oughta do 'er. Okay. Here we go. Look out, you big bum, here comes the first deliberate curve ever pitched in history."

After that, what? Did the batter know it was a curve? Did the catcher know it was a curve? Did the spectators know it?

I think it's improbable that any of these people knew Arthur Cummings had deliberately thrown a curve. I believe he was the only person present who knew it. Having thrown the ball, I can picture him swaggering down to the plate, chuckling to himself as he approached the batter.

"Hey," I can hear him saying. "Hey, dopey. Know why you wasn't able to hit that last'n?"

"Sure," says the batter, "I got dust in my eyes and my hind foot slipped and your catcher jabbed me in the side with his glove and I got a bad head cold."

"Like hell," says Arthur Cummings. "You didn't hit it because it curved. I threw a curve. Deliberate."

"No kid," says the batter.

"Swearta God I throwed a curve," says Arthur Cummings. "And listen. Soon as you're out, run up an' tell th' boys in th' press box about it, will ya? I don't wanna do it myself. Wouldn't look good."

Maybe that's the way it happened but, so far as I can learn, the actual details are lost in time. I do think, however, that it would be a lovely thing, after all these years, to learn that cocksure Arthur Cummings outsmarted himself—that his first deliberate curve in all history was as straight as a hoe handle.



## SYSTEMS

When pari-mutuel betting came to New York State the system was inaugurated at the Jamaica track on Long Island. My paper handed me fourteen dollars and told me to go out and be a little fellow. The pari-mutuels were voted in to give the little man a chance at the races, and my assignment was to investigate that chance.

I have no skill whatever in the evaluation of horseflesh. People at the track converged on the paddock and studied the animals critically, remarking on the beauty of this point and the strength of

that. To me they were all horses and, except maybe for coloring, they all looked alike. On my program I noted that one of the races was for maidens. I assumed that this race was restricted to horses who were unloved.

Before taking my fling at the track I inquired around about various methods of betting, not overlooking the scientific, and my report on the outcome may or may not represent a true picture of what can happen to the little man.

In the first race I tried the Third-R System. You take the program and start down the list of horses and when you come to a horse that has an r for the third letter of his name you stop and you bet. In this case it was a horse named Egress. Egress finished sixth, which doesn't count.

Next came the Madge MacDonald System, a system worked out by a lady named Madge MacDonald. In this system you go to the paddock and look at the tails of the horses. The horse which waggles its tail most enthusiastically—that horse is, according to Madge MacDonald, a sure thing. Down at the paddock I stared at horse tails, thinking of many of my friends back in town, and at last a horse named Peace Day gave eight or ten brisk wags, and I almost tore down fences getting to the two-dollar-straight windows. Peace Day, treacherous tail and all, finished fourth.

With the third race coming up, it was time for the Association-of-Ideas System. This took long study, but inspiration finally came. It was a horse named Foxflame. I remembered some people in Illinois named Fox. One night the Fox barn burned down, arousing the countryside and making quite a flame. Fox, flame. Foxflame came in second, whereas my two dollars was for sheer, clean-cut victory. Six bucks down the drain.

Moving through the clubhouse crowd after this great disappointment, I suddenly saw Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt. I do not know Mr. Vanderbilt, and Mr. Vanderbilt does not know me, but I stepped up and introduced myself and extended my program.

"Pick out a hot one for me," I requested.

Mr. Vanderbilt bridled, but I pressed him, and finally he took the program and made a little check mark by the name of Marogay.

He asked no fee for this little piece of touting, and again I skidded around corners getting to the windows. Two dollars on Marogay's nose. Marogay ran fourth.

The fifth race was the feature of the day, and I decided to try out Hambla Bauer, a new lady handicapper whose selections were being printed daily in our paper. She had chosen Day Off in this race. I bet two dollars on Day Off to win. Day Off came in last by the breadth of Texas, and I was indignant. They should keep women out of saloons and handicapping.



## OLE DIZ

1850 was the season in which Dizzy Dean was brought up to the big time as a television commentator for the New York Yankees. Within a week after he had started his new job the statistical purists were complaining. They got no amusement whatever out of Dizzy's unorthodox performance at the microphone. They were furious when, on occasion, Diz would suddenly forget the ball game altogether and break into song about goin' fishin' in th' craw-dad hole. To the statistical fan baseball is a dead-serious business. There's no room in it for frivolity. If a cat comes scampering onto the playing field and eludes capture for ten minutes, holding up the progress of the game, they are indignant about it, and cuss the cat and cuss the rest of us who whoop and cheer.

Dizzy Dean represented, then, a new and delightful diversion to us; the things he did and the things he said were often as entertaining as the ball games he was describing, or neglecting to describe. Much of the stuff that has been written about him since his assignment with the Yankees has missed the mark. Even as astute a writer as Joe Williams insists that Dizzy says "slud" for "slid." Never. What he says is "slood," making it rhyme with wood. Someone else, trying to write an account of Dizzy's appearance on a television panel show, also missed the boat. Dizzy was seated next to H. V. Kaltenborn during that program, and Mr.

Kaltenborn needled him gently about his abuse of the English language, whereupon Diz responded: "Well now, I tell ya, Mr. Kattlinbomb, it's this way . . ."

There are, of course, many do-gooders who would like to see Dizzy barred from channels of public communication on the grounds that he is exercising a deleterious influence on the hordes of children who listen to his Ozarkian rhetoric. These complainants say that if it isn't stopped, the children will inevitably begin talking the way Dizzy talks. Well, suppose they do. It's talkin', ain't it?

Dizzy has certain locutions which recur frequently in his haphazard narration of a ball game. A player threw a ball, or thode it. An umpire is an umparr. Everybody on the playing field does everything nonchalantly. That is one of his favorite words. "There he goes," says Diz, "walkin' nonchalantly up to the plate." He spoke once of a passed batter "trottin' nonchalantly down to first." And of another as "squattin' nonchalantly in the on-deck circle." Once when a batter had fanned, Dizzy described him as "walkin' nonchalantly back to the dugout in diss-gust." The TV screen one day was holding a close-up of home plate while Catcher Yogi Berra was out at the mound conferring with his pitcher. As Berra started back to his position his feet and then his legs came into view at the top of the television screen. Said Diz: "There comes Berra's shin guards walkin' nonchalantly back to the plate." And again, "That tremenjous roar you hear is Ted Williams walkin' nonchalantly up to the batter's box."

Sometimes a batter "walks disgustilly" to the dugout after fanning. Sometimes he "stands confidentially" at the plate. And the players come off the "bainch" to "take their respectable positions."

A ball is "farred over to second" and a third strike sometimes "retarrs the side." When a pitcher fields a bunt Diz says: "He bounced on it like a cat on a mouse." A hard-hit ground ball that gets away from an infielder is usually described as having "karmed off his glove."

Dizzy speaks of "sprang training" and "peench hitters" and the relief hurler "throwin' down his plimminary pitches." He summarizes, "No hits, no runs, and no airs." Errors are always airs. He

describes conferences "in the middle of the diament." He says time has been called while a base runner "is lacening up his shoes." He becomes the baseball expert when he remarks, "They's gonna be a little fancy stragedy pulled now." The adverb "far" is always "for" in the Dean lexicon. "Lopat's got five strike-outs in the ball game so for," he says. Or, "As you seen on your screen, that's the first air of the ball game so for." He describes a hard-laboring pitcher as having "pussperation clean thew his uniform." And in announcing a pamphlet which the public may get by writing in, he says, "You can have the new Yankee sketch book if you woosh."

During a close shot of a batter, Dizzy advises: "Look careful now and you can see the heesive tape on his neck." Once when Joe DiMaggio made a magnificent catch deep in center—running with his back toward the plate and reaching high above his head to snag a fly ball, Dizzy yelled: "Holy cow! He caught it with his back in front of the pitcher's box!"

In a pre-season exhibition game at the stadium Dizzy uttered the following remarkable sentence: "That loads the Brooklyn Dodgers fulla bases." Speaking once of a player coming up to bat, he said, "He resembles Crosetti like he used to look." And on the occasion of a spirited rhubarb, he remarked: "They better watch out. That umparr used to be an ex-fighter." He is usually contrite when he makes a mistake in calling a play. "I bag your pardon!" he says.

"This is what you call a real slugger's fest," he explained one day. And for the benefit of the amateur scorekeepers: "You gotta give the pitcher a sist on that." Discussing Ted Williams admiringly, he said: "Look at that stance on him! Brother, they's rhythm in that stance!" And of the Red Sox catcher: "Most all ballplayers got nicknames and Birdie Tebbetts's is Birdie because he's always a-hollerin' like a little ole kinary bird." Recalling the career of Dolph Camilli he said: "There was one of the gracefulest first base-mans I ever seen." And during a tight situation in a close game, he remarked, "Brother, they's a lotta nerve-rackin' out there on that field right now." Dizzy's comment on the lazily relaxed manner of

Joe Gordon was: "Look at 'im. There's a fella you look at 'im you say, there's a fella dreads to do anything."

Sometimes Dizzy tries to be helpful to his audience, explaining things about baseball itself or about his own manner of speech. He spoke once of the futility of quarreling with an umpire, saying, "You might as well try to argy with a stump." After a moment's reflection, he continued: "Some of you New York folks might not know what a stump is. Well, I'll tell ya. A stump is a wood thing . . . well, it's somethin' a tree has been cut down off of."

One day when a visiting manager was making his way to the mound for the purpose of yanking his pitcher, Dizzy filled in with information out of his own vast experience.

"You folks," he said, "prob'ly wonder what's goin' on out there—what they're savin' to one another. Well, I had some experience pitchin' and I can tell you what's goin' on. In the first place, that pitcher he's hot as a farrcracker. And he prob'ly don't like the idee of bein' took out. So when the manager comes walkin' nonchalantly out to the mound, the pitcher he says, 'Aw, fer cryin' out loud!' So the manager he says, 'Now take it easy, son. You cain't win ever' day.' So the pitcher he says, 'Aw, fer cryin' out loud! If I coulda got that one guy out, that bum, they never woulda got nowheres offa me.' Then the manager he says, 'Now take it easy, son. You go on and take a sharr and git some rest and maybe you can beat 'em tuh marr.' So the pitcher's purty burned up, and he says, 'Aw, fer cryin' out loud!' But he's gotta go, so he goes. That's approxi-mate-ly what goes on out there at the mound, folks."

At times he becomes a philosopher, as in his salute to Phil Rizzuto when the Yankee shortstop insisted on staying in the game after being hurt. "Brother," exclaimed Diz, "I wanna tell you that's determination and will parr to play baseball!"

One day at stretch time in the seventh, he remarked, "Well, the fans has all stood up and woosht the Yankees good luck."

Approaching the plate, a batter once bent over to get some dirt on his hands, eliciting from Dizzy the following observation: "I want you folks to take a good look at that. Lookit him rubbin' his hands around in the dirt. I 'member when I was a little kid and



useta go out and play in the dirt and then when we'd go home our mothers would whip us. Well sir, right there in fronta your eyes is big grown men out there playin' in the dirt. Dog-gone if this ain't a crazy world!"

The camera, which Dizzy always calls the camery, moved up close to an umpire standing near second base one afternoon.

"Lookit that umparr," said Diz, "standin' out there with his arms behind his back. Umparrs don't never seem to know what to do with their hands. They either got them behind their backs or folded. Lookit 'im out there! Looks sorta like a statcha."

Dizzy complains frequently about the amount of written material that is handed him in the course of a game because he has to read it and he doesn't like to read. After struggling through a long commercial one afternoon he concluded with: "Well, at least I got through to the end. I admit I cain't read good. But they's one thing I know. When that pitcher thows that ball, he thows it. When that ketcher ketches it, he ketches it. And when that hitter hits it, he hits it. That's all you gotta know, folks."



# NOTES ON THE ENGLISH





## MR. BEBNER ON AMERICA

Mikes analyzes the American style of eating and concludes that it is juvenile, or rather, infantile. The American eats the way he ate as a tiny child, when the mother cut the meat into bits for him and then put the fork in his right hand and told him to eat or get bashed. The funny thing about Americans, said Mr. Bebner, is that they continue eating that way all their lives, like three-year-olds. I considered this a fair criticism and wasn't irritated by it. Mr. Bebner was going on about how the fork was invented by the British people in the time of Elizabeth and saying that the inventor of an article ought to be the best judge of how to use it properly, and then Nelle got into the conversation with some remarks on royalty. I kicked her a couple of times under the table but she wasn't to be stopped. She told Mr. Bebner that in these twentieth-century times it is ridiculous for a civilized nation to bend the knee to kings and queens and princesses; she said it is ridiculous for a nation that is suffering want to be spending all those huge sums of money on palaces and castles and golden coaches and overgrown toy soldiers. But over and above the cost of these things, she said, the adulation of these people is as childish as the American way of handling a fork. She said she thought the Royal Family was composed of real nice people; she had no doubt that the King was a good man. She went on and on and throughout her recital Mr. Bebner indulged in a heavy sort of breathing and his mustache was twitching at the edges and he was turning slightly pink. The moment he got an opening he leveled his knife at Nelle and said:

"My dear lady, we maintain special madhouses for people who are so stupid as to criticize the institution of Royalty. I would advise

you against uttering such sentiments elsewhere, lest you find yourself in a strait-waistcoat."

"I still say," argued Nelle, "that the kind of adulation and worship you give to those people over in Buckingham Palace ought to be given to someone who has accomplished something. Those people don't do anything but pose, and smile, and wave to the people."

Mr. Bebner lowered his eating tools to the table.

"Pardon me," he said, "may I be rude? I want to ask you a long question. What would you think of a country that is all but in thrall to the psychiatrists; where the politicians are so crooked that the nation is never without its major scandal; where it is impossible for a thoroughly honest man ever to be elected to public office; where hypocrisy prevails in every direction and especially in religion; where the citizens babble forever about their freedom, which is simply freedom to be dumb; where journalists predict the weather by looking at worms and the public accepts these predictions as truth; where the national literature is contained in comic books; where the national music consists of drooling ballads; where many of the national heroes and heroines subsist on a diet of sleeping pills; where athletic events are a national passion and yet are crooked beyond belief; where the citizens are taught that their country is the perfect country and all other ways of life are wrong and stupid; where the people consistently distinguish between big laws and little laws; where it is fashionable to cheat the customs officers and an enviable achievement to cheat the income tax collectors; where crooks are sometimes found out and prosecuted, only to become folk heroes and go on to greater glories; where the police themselves are criminal; where the women wear artificial breasts made of foam rubber; where the . . ."

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "What on earth are you talking about, Bebner?"

"The United States of America."

"Oh," I said.

He ate his pudding with a runcible spoon and left soon after that and Nelle was a bit upset by it all. As for myself, I had my usual ex-

perience of thinking of a good comeback when it was too late to use it. I had him at least on one thing—music. It was in England, as I recall, that the song “I Tawt I Taw a Puddy Tat” became a national rage.



## LANGUAGE

An Englishman, I figured, wouldn't even be able to understand the language of the Midwest. From the time of Ruggles and even before, the Englishman's inability to comprehend American talk and customs has served as a source of great merriment for Americans. During the recent war I remember a story about an English editor who was working on some copy handed in by an American writer. He came upon the phrase, “So's your old man.” He changed it to, “Your father is also.” Almost as bad as the French. You'll remember the celebrated response given by Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe to a German ultimatum. General McAuliffe said, “Nuts!” The French newspapers were praiseful, of course, but the general's expression had them confused. They finally translated it: “*Vous n'êtes que de vieilles noix.*” In other words, “You are nothing but old nuts.”



## STANLEY'S LINE

One of the great classic examples of English restraint and conformity to the code of gentility is that of Henry Stanley when, after seven harrowing months, he found his man and said, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume.” I think I see what he means. An American would never have said anything like that. If it had been me, I'd have said: “Great goddle mighty! Where you been? I been lookin' all over hell's half acre for you!”



## COCKNEY

In front of Charing Cross Station a character in a cloth cap walked up to a bobby and said distinctly:

“Whuh uh beh wye uh geh uh wuh uh loo sty uh.”

Sirens went off in my head. I understood it! I knew exactly what that man said: “What is the best way to get to Waterloo Station?” I may not be able to talk it, but I can understand it. I got out my notebook and wrote it down as the man had said it, or tried to, saying the words over to myself, and the above version is as near as I could get to it.



## THE DANDIES

Edwardian dandies are young men indulging in a fad—costuming themselves in the fashion affected when their grandfathers were young. They wear tight pants, gay-colored weskits, white stiff collars two sizes too small so that their eyes have a tendency to bug, and bowler hats cramped forward to rest on their eyebrows. They let their hair grow tufted out at the temples and they stand about with their mouths open, in an attitude of adenoidal boredom. This latter trait is to be found among certain Englishmen of all ages, and is a characteristic which I find most attractive. Nature has furnished them with large upper teeth and has arranged the lips so that the upper labial area is not sufficient to cover those teeth, whilst the lower lip is drawn tightly inward. The whole spectacular effect is often accentuated by the wearing of a squarish black mustache. I don't have the mustache, but it isn't necessary. I find that by standing in front of a mirror and dragging my upper lip backward and upward and fixing my whole face as if I were about to sneeze, I can look pretty much like this type of Englishman. It seems to add character to my physiognomy.





## IMMORTAL LINE

Someone recalled a famous remark made by one of Mr. Gubbins' daughters. She was, at the time, quite a small girl and one day she came to her father and said:

"What would happen if I said shut up to the Queen?"

I was assured that this line will live as long as England lives.



## FIELDS OF ETON

We crossed the Thames into Eton and went to the school, but the boys were off on hols and the place was fairly deserted. I insisted upon seeing the playing fields, and Dick said they were not all in one piece, but scattered about, and he escorted me up to the edge of one and I stood for several minutes, feeling the stirrings of history, gusts of emotion sweeping through my soul as I murmured to myself: "Just to think! Here is where the Battle of Yorktown was lost!"



## ELECTION MEETING

Tonight Mr. Pond drove me out to an election meeting in a section which I shall call Ample Fluddley and on the way we talked about the difference between American and English political oratory. Over here a candidate doesn't deliver a campaign speech—he engages in a running argument with the voters. Remarkably enough the ordinary English citizen, the moment he crosses the threshold of the meeting hall, discards all he ever learned in the way of politeness. Mr. Pond said that's as it should be—this is one occasion when the ordinary man comes into his own, when he becomes as important almost as the King, and the rules say he can speak his mind as loudly as he sees fit. Mr. Pond was amused when I told him about

the way we do it in America. I said that heckling was rather rare at American election meetings, one reason being that only Republicans go to hear a Republican candidate speak, and a Democratic candidate's audience is composed of people who already believe as he does. Mr. Pond said he couldn't see much point in that kind of electioneering—that in England a candidate is likely to find more enemies than friends in his audience.

The meeting we attended was held in a shabby room that had once been a shop of some kind and the speaker was the Hon. Euphemia Dalrymple, Labour candidate for re-election to Commons. There were about three hundred men and women in the audience and the Hon. Euphemia was already launched on her argument when we eased in and took up a position in the rear of the hall. I shall set down here just enough of the talk to illustrate the procedure:

**EUPHEMIA:** . . . and I'd like to remind the gentleman with the flat nose that this is my fifth election . . .

**FIRST MAN:** It'll be yer larst!

**EUPHEMIA:** I would judge from your appearance, Sir, that you are a prize fighter. I am opposed to prize fighting, but if you don't shut your trap, I'll come down there and take you on myself. . . .

**VOICES:** Bash 'im, Famiel! Chuck 'im out!

*(Heated arguments now occur at various places in the audience and several men and women known as stewards flitter here and there, trying to quiet the disputants.)*

**EUPHEMIA (loudly):** No! We have room for everyone here. Paps we can convert him to the proper way of thinking. Paps we can convince him that the Conservatives have no constructive program.

**WOMAN:** What you call what you got? What you Socialists got but a lot of blinkin' nonsense?

**SECOND MAN:** Right! Wot about the Groundnuts Scheme?

**EUPHEMIA:** You must have come in late, else your head

- wants seeing to. We've already been over that. . . .
- THIRD MAN: 'Url the blaggard out!
- SECOND MAN: Come and 'url me out yerself if y'd like to try it!
- SECOND WOMAN: (*a small elderly person with a shrill voice*) Silly oss!
- EUPHEMIA: Here, now! Enough of that! I came here to-night to demonstrate with hard facts that you people are better off than you ever were in your lives . . .
- FOURTH MAN: You mean you are! The politicians in Commons! Let's talk about Ample Fluddley!
- EUPHEMIA: Precisely what I am talking about. Now let's take . . .
- THIRD WOMAN: Rubbish!
- EUPHEMIA: Please wait until I say something. Madam, why don't you go home and get your housework done? You've come here with a loud voice and no brain back of it. I'll wager your house is a mess!
- THIRD WOMAN: Wot about yer own 'ouse, Miss Igh and Mighty!
- FOURTH WOMAN: Shut yer trap!
- THIRD WOMAN: I'll shut my trap when she decides to tell the truth—is Nye Bevan runnin' things or an't 'e?
- FIRST MAN: Blost 'im!
- THIRD MAN: Mind yer tongue, or I'll . . .
- EUPHEMIA: Now as to Egypt, I say flatly that Churchill is responsible for the horrible things that are going on . . .
- FIRST WOMAN: You're a liar!
- EUPHEMIA: Stewards! Remove that person! I've had enough of her!
- FIRST WOMAN: Not arf! I'm not finished with you yet!

- SECOND MAN:** Nor me neither! Wot about the Groundnuts Scheme!
- THIRD MAN:** Flicker off, you blaggard!
- SECOND WOMAN:** Chuck 'im out!
- EUPHEMIA:** Hold up a bit! Let's not turn this thing into another shemozzle!
- FIFTH MAN:** You've turned the whole country into a shemozzle! Why don't you give up and let decent people take over?
- EUPHEMIA:** Is the gentleman suggesting that I am not decent? If he'll just say so, I'll come down there and give him something to remember me by.
- VOICES:** Go ahead! Bash him, Farnie! It's worse nor a crime!

The meeting soon broke up and I thought a great deal had been accomplished; and driving home, thinking about this display of democracy at work, a strange notion occurred to me, to wit: what these people need is some good solid history behind them.



## CURE FOR BALDNESS

I can't resist putting down the story of Leon Kay's revenge. Leon is at this moment somewhere in the Middle East, serving the United Press as a war correspondent. He is an old friend of mine though I have not seen much of him since 1835 when he was sent to London. He could handle half a dozen languages and in the years just before the war he worked at a desk in the UP London bureau.

Soon after his arrival he sent a suit of clothes out to be cleaned. Something like two weeks elapsed before it came back, and when it did come, all the buttons were off the coat, trousers, and vest. It appears that the English cleaners remove all the buttons before cleaning a suit and, when they return it, they also return a small bag containing the buttons. This quaint custom struck Leon Kay as

being uncivilized, impractical, and insane. In fact, it made him angry, and he swore that he'd get revenge on the English race if the opportunity ever came.

He worked the lobster trick on Saturday nights and amused himself through the dull hours by reading the letters-to-the-editor section of the *Sunday Times*. This London paper devoted acres of space to such letters. A reader would write in to report that he had sighted a water pipit, which is a form of bird, in a certain neighborhood. His letter would bring perhaps fifty others from people who reported that they, too, had seen water pipits, people who said they had not seen any water pipits, and people who said they hoped they would see some water pipits.

On one Saturday night Leon was reading a long series of letters to the *Times* discussing remedies for baldness. As he read he was eating a cottage pudding brought in by the office boy from a neighboring restaurant.

Suddenly Leon transferred his attention from the printed page to the pudding. It was a frightful blob of seal-brown stuff containing a scattering of raisins. Leon contemplated its unlovely texture for a bit, then a fine idea smote him.

That week end he searched through British cookbooks until he found the recipe for the pudding. Then he wrote a scholarly letter to the *Times*. He described himself as a person who had recently made the acquaintance of an old inhabitant of Kent, and this old inhabitant of Kent had given him a sovereign remedy for baldness. It worked wonders on the scalps of Kentish people, wherefore there was no reason to suppose it would not work wonders on the scalps of people elsewhere. After that Leon set down the recipe for the pudding.

"Please note," his letter concluded, "the presence of the raisins in this decoction. We know that raisins contain a plenitude of iron. Can it be that this iron is the essential element, the fertilizing ingredient, in the remarkable salve? I would greatly enjoy hearing from other *Times* readers who may have had experience with this Kentish elixir."

The *Sunday Times*, to be sure, printed it. There were responses.

Several correspondents wrote in with long and learned disquisitions on raisins and their possible effect on follicles. One colossal liar said that he had heard tell of this splendid noggin lotion and was aware of its efficacy.

Leon Kay was satisfied. His revenge for the button incident was complete. Even now I imagine he sometimes chuckles when he thinks of the many elderly gentlemen throughout the British Isles who, at this very moment, may be solemnly kneading cottage pudding—raisins and all—into their glistening scalps.



## DOGGEDNESS

Mr. McGowran said his favorite story illustrating British doggedness concerns a rural letter carrier whose route encompassed several villages and which he covered on foot. It was his custom to cut through the fields from one village to the next. One day he climbed the fence of a large field and started for the far side when an enormous bull charged toward him. He began running, with the bull in pursuit, gaining on him at every step. The bull was at his heels when he reached the fence on the far side. He hurled his pouch of mail across the fence and then threw himself through the air, clearing the rails and landing in a heap on the sod, out of reach of the animal. A stranger was standing close by and had witnessed the excitement. The letter carrier lay still for a few moments, trembling in every limb, cold sweat on his brow, his eyes tightly closed, a few groans escaping from his lips. Then he opened his eyes and looked up into the face of the stranger, who said, "'E almost got you that time!" Said the letter carrier, "'E almost gets me every time!"



## ROB WILTON

I was particularly attracted to the performance of Rob Wilton, an old-time English comedian. Not so much because of what he had to say; I just wanted to see the man. He has an interesting

hobby. On Christmas Eve he sets out on a grand tour of public conveniences, or necessities. In these rooms, as in America, the walls are covered with scrawled obscenities and Mr. Wilton goes from one to another and, using a heavy crayon, writes in large letters across the top of each wall: A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR READERS.



## TWO WISE MEN

ITEM. George the Third, the monarch who was in power when America quit, was . . . well, peculiar. He got into an argument one day with his ministers about the production of cattle. He demanded to know why the people were not planting more beef. One of the ministers gently informed him that beef isn't grown from seed planted by people. But old George had a mind of his own, and later he went into the palace gardens with some chunks of beefsteak and planted them in a neat row.

ITEM. There was once a Carmelite friar who stood on the banks of the Thames and praised the divine goodness and wisdom which cause navigable rivers to flow past large towns.



## INSULTING A LADY

Mr. Cohen-Portheim, in his book on England, describes the manner in which the Lady has been put on a pedestal, to be worshiped as an innocent, softhearted creature who has no notion of the wickedness of the world. He means, I think, the Lady of Quality. East of Ludgate values have never been the same, in respect to females, as they have been up West. A man named Arvine wrote about the occasion when Dr. Johnson made a wager with Boswell that he could go into the Billingsgate fish market and put a woman into a passion without saying a word that she could understand. They proceeded to the market and, settling on a certain lady, Johnson looked at her fish and then held his nose. The lady promptly called him an old son of a dog.

Dr. Johnson responded: "You are an article, madam."

"No more nor an article than yourself, you bloody misbegotten villain."

"You are a noun, woman!" said Johnson.

She sputtered and fumed and cursed.

"You are a pronoun!" Dr. Johnson fired at her.

She raised her fists and started toward him as if to rip him apart and, as he retreated, Dr. Johnson assaulted her with more words, calling her a verb, an adverb, an adjective, a conjunction, a preposition, an interjection. This was too much for her to bear—she collapsed in the mud, shrieking with rage, and Boswell paid the bet.



## HA-HA EXPLAINED

There is one English expression that had me in a dill-water daze for a while—ha-ha. I came upon it in an article about landscape gardening; the author spoke of the invention of the ha-ha as being an important development in modern landscaping. I rang up Mr. Jacobs on this one and found out that a ha-ha is a sort of ditch with a fence in it. If I had a small estate in the country adjoining the property of Lord Gaspains, we might agree to construct a ha-ha on the dividing line. We would dig a ditch with sloping sides and run the fence along the bottom of the ditch. Then when I had company down from the city we could sit on my terrace and look out across an unbroken vista. The fence would not be apparent to the eye, and my visitors would get the impression that I owned much more acreage than was actually the case. I asked Mr. Jacobs: "Why do I have the fence in the first place?" He said: "You keep sheep."



## COLLOQUY

At the *Savage* Club I took note of the following conversation:

MR. GUBBINS:

The wisest man I ever knew once told me never to . . .



- MR. PURDELL (*interrupting*): Who was he?  
MR. GUBBINS: Who?  
MR. PURDELL: The wisest man you ever knew?  
MR. GUBBINS: I can't seem to remember the chap's name.  
MR. PURDELL: What was it he told you?  
MR. GUBBINS: Dear me! I've forgotten. You've knocked it out of me.



### TRICK-CYCLISTS

A word one hears on every side in England is "crackers." A person who is crackers is daft. The King has a dog named Crackers. The wide usage of the term is difficult to understand, considering that the English are almost wholly contemptuous of the institution of psychiatry. On the one hand they contend that no Englishman could ever possibly achieve a condition of mind in which he would need the services of a psychiatrist; and on the other they refer frequently to one another as being crackers. This derisive attitude toward psychiatrists extends into the law courts where they are sometimes spoken of, by the present King's Counsel, as "trick-cyclists." From all I have heard, I judge that an Englishman would drool himself to death before he would permit a psychiatrist to enter his presence, and the few practicing psychiatrists in London have almost been reduced to analyzing each other. In the popular esteem their science is classified somewhat below the trade of astrologers, numerologists and bump-readers.



### THE PIDDOCK CHEESE

At the time of Queen Victoria's marriage the villages throughout England sent wedding gifts up to London, and the people of Piddock in Somerset decided to contribute a mammoth cheese measuring twelve feet in diameter. Having finished the cheese, they were

faced with the problem of transporting it a hundred and fifty miles to London. They had exhausted their resources in building the cheese, so now there was nothing left to do but roll it to the city. This operation took longer than they had anticipated and the cheese arrived too late for the royal wedding. The Piddockians were most unhappy, and stony broke, so now they decided to exhibit the cheese around London and charge admission to see it. At once they split into two factions. One group wanted to exhibit the actual cheese while another group insisted that a plaster model of it be placed on display. The latter group argued that Londoners would hack the real cheese to bits, carrying it away in chunks as souvenirs. The dispute grew bitter and one faction carried the matter to court, whereupon the Piddock Cheese was seized and placed in chancery pending a settlement. Months went by, and the chancery people complained that the cheese was beginning to smell up their premises, and by this time the London public had lost interest in it, so it was released to the faction which contended that truth is beauty. The plaster-model faction went home and the others began rolling the cheese around England, exhibiting it in other villages; and now pieces began falling off the cheese, and the tread wore down until, in the end, there was no Piddock Cheese left at all.

"I wouldn't be surprised," concluded Mr. Jonathan Rauth, "if in the village of Piddock, to this day, there are two factions, violently opposed in religion, politics, and everything else—possibly calling themselves the Plasters and the Genuines."

**ODDS & ODDS**





## GREELEY'S WHISKERS

From what I know of his life story, I think Horace Greeley simply got weary of things in general, including the fact that nobody could read his handwriting, and also, certainly, including that beard he wore. I have examined dozens of photographs of the old man and in each of them the beard is the thing that holds my attention. At first glance you would surmise that it was not a beard at all, that it didn't grow out of his chin or even his wattles—that it was an extension, or overflow, of his chest hair. There is a classic picture of Horace in an office at Chappaqua, a picture often described as "A good likeness," and close examination of it would convince anyone that chest hair was spilling out from around the old man's collar. You look at it and think about it and then realize that such a thing couldn't be so, because it would involve too great an effort in the matter of getting dressed every morning. The chest hair, assuming that it was a couple of feet long, would have to be combed upward, pompadoured, while the chin was held high. Then Horace would have had to hold it in place until he got his shirt and collar on, so that a few inches of it would hang out over the collar. It couldn't be done, neatly, without the services of at least one valet; unless, of course, his chest hair grew on him like bananas, upward. So it must have actually been a beard, growing under the chin, beneath the line of the jaw. The daily task of shaving around the edge of a thing like that would be, for me at least, sufficient to bring on a brain fever.

Bank statements have always disturbed me. They'll present two

frightening sets of figures which serve to convey the final information that the bank has:

Total Resources	.....	\$295,844,312.16
Total Liabilities	.....	\$295,844,312.16

If I were a banker I wouldn't advertise *that*. They got *nothing*. If they started out the year with anything at all in the way of money, it's all gone now. I don't want to do any business with them.

I never cease to marvel over the wisdom that has gone into the designing of the human body. Why did Nature put those little flaps of skin and gristle just outside the vestibule of the ear? Obviously so that army officers can use their fingers to close out the roar of big guns without poking holes in their eardrums. Yet there is another school of thought in this matter—a school which believes that Nature put those flaps there to protect the inner ears of people who get hit on the side of the head by foul balls in Yankee Stadium. Or, let us consider the general structure of the human head. It came to me in a flash one day that Nature had done an almost perfect job in adapting the human head to the hangman's noose. Some people say, however, that the hangman's noose came after the human head had assumed its present shape and, in fact, the hangman's noose was thought up by the human head for which it was designed.

Buffalo was our point of departure. Before loading the car on the ship my wife wanted to drive out and see Niagara Falls, but I talked her out of it. I happen to know about those falls. They are slowly wearing away and eventually will flatten out. This will take place in a mere five thousand years. I'm not going out of my way to look at natural wonders that have no staying power. Here today and gone tomorrow. Furthermore I must think of the people of five thousand years hence and of my reputation among them. Listen, dreamboat, I'm writing for posterity. When they pick up my book in the year 6949 I don't want them to complain, "Look what this bum says. Says right here that there used to be a big hump in all that flat water up around Buffalo. Great writer—genius in a way—

but undependable. Well, go put the cat out, and let's get to bed."

"You go to hell. It's your turn to put her out."

It happens that I am partial to Mexican cookery. On one of the little side streets of Santa Fe we found a restaurant specializing in Mexican food and hurried in to have a try at it. We ate in the patio with a beach umbrella over our heads. The food was fair, and there was a hot sauce that was first-rate. I know it was first-rate because a large fly came buzzing down and landed in the little dish containing the sauce. He took off immediately, made a noise like a miniature dive bomber, rammed the ceiling of the umbrella, looped the loop twice, and died like a dog. That was real tasty sauce.

The records show that there were 75,656 Smiths in the armed forces of the United States during World War II. This figure does not include the author, a heroic air-raid warden ordering lesser citizens to step lively along the streets of Jackson Heights. Nor does it include the war correspondents who were scattered over the globe. John Lardner tells me of three Smiths who were correspondents on Guam along toward the end of the war. They were called Wonderful Smith, Horrible Smith, and Pack Rat Smith. Wonderful Smith was not the Wondert... Smith who performs on the Red Skelton radio show, nor was he called Wonderful because he was wonderful. He acquired the name because his inevitable reaction to everything he saw or heard was "Wonderful!" If someone told him Spam was on the menu for dinner, he said "Wonderful!" If he heard that Colonel So-and-So had fallen into a latrine, he said "Wonderful!" If the word flashed round that a Jap attacking force was due in twenty minutes, he said "Wonderful!" On the other hand, Horrible Smith was called Horrible because those who worked with him considered him to be horrible. And Pack Rat Smith, an immense reporter out of the Midwest, had a passion for collecting all manner of souvenirs. He once flung himself into the midst of a fierce battle in order to grab a boulder the size of a basketball to place on his mantel back home.

I have heard, too, that in the Pacific theater there was a first lieutenant known affectionately to his men as Chicken S. Smith.

My radio career didn't last long, but I do think I got a lot out of it. I remember attending a rehearsal once and overhearing a conversation between two musicians. One man said he had been rejected by his draft board.

"What's the matter with you?" asked the other.

"I got head murmurs."

Haven't we all?

Idwal Jones is the gourmet of the crowd, knows all about fancy foods and how to prepare them. He looks upon most restaurant cooks with Lucullan contempt, and I once heard him observe of a certain chef: "That culinary scoundrel is not fit to tote guts to a bear."

He was a thin, bony man wearing nose glasses and above the frames a vast expanse of forehead—the sign of a philosopher in some people, the physical mark of a fathead in others.

I don't hold that death does anything toward dignifying a person. I think that when people die they ought to explode, like trick cigars, so everyone could get a good laugh out of it. These days the idea doesn't seem to be as farfetched as it sounds. I could wish nothing better than that, when my time came, I exploded in technicolor, in a field box at Yankee Stadium or while making a speech before the Women's Club of Scarsdale or at High Mass.

"Never liked airy woman I ever seen," said Fizzer. "I had a adopted mother, didn't even like her. She was always hollerin' for me to come and hold my finger on a string while she tied a knot. Women is the reason for all the trouble we got in the world. I had my way, every woman orta be branded. Orta have their dewlaps cut first, and then branded."

There is only one rule governing my own drinking. I never sing while engaged in tilting the flowing bowl. This self-imposed restriction is a precaution against sudden death—not necessarily be-



cause I'm a lousy singer. There was a time when three highballs would invariably set me to wailing about "My Melancholy Baby," but no more. I have a small phobia about singing during drinking hours. It dates from the time I was reading a book on Greek history and came to the story of Terpander.

This Terpander was a Greek poet and musician and, according to tradition, invented the *scolion*, or drinking song. Having invented it, he had to show that he was proud of his invention. He had to go around singing drinking songs and to do that he had to get drunk. Consequently, Terpander was generally plastered and singing *scolia*. One day in Sparta he crawled out of bed, took a couple of bromos, and staggered around to another drinking party. (Greek civilization was glorious.) As soon as Terpander got a few under his tunic he began singing *scolia* as usual. The book doesn't tell us the name of the song he was singing but we do know that somebody at the party didn't like it. Terpander was warbling away when this unknown critic picked up a fig and threw it at him. Just at that moment Terpander was reaching for a high note. His mouth was wide open and into it flew the fig, whereupon Terpander choked to death, everybody applauded, and all hands had another snort.

Let that be a lesson to you, as it has been to me. Don't ever sing while you're drinking.

A director needed a couple of animals for a forthcoming sequence. The director got the name of an animal dealer and sat down to write him a letter. At the very beginning he was stumped. He wasn't sure about the plural of mongoose. He tried it this way first:

Dear Sir:

*Please send me two mongooses . . .*

That didn't look right, so he threw the sheet in the wastebasket and started over again, this way:

Dear Sir:

*Please send me two mongeese . . .*

That seemed even worse than the first try. The director sat and studied a bit, then got it figured out. On a fresh sheet of paper he wrote:

*Dear Sir:*

*Please send me a mongoose. By the way, while you're at it, send me another one.*

I like to think that someone named Smith had an important hand in the events of that December day back in 1903 when the Wrights did it at Kill Devil Hill. Of all those in the little group that witnessed the first flight, the one I'd enjoy identifying as a Smith was the coastguardman who got the news out to the rest of the world. He ran all the way back to town, rushed into the telegraph office, and cried out certainly one of the most historic announcements of all time: "They have flew!"

A radio actor usually carries a red pencil. He takes a script and goes through it, marking his cue lines and putting a red circle around his own name wherever it appears. Then, off in a corner by himself, he rehearses the lines he has to speak. He seldom reads what the other people on the program have to say. He only knows his cue, and then what he has to say. He might appear on dozens of dramatic programs and never have an idea what the show is all about.

Back in Revolutionary times there was a family known as the Horseblock Smiths living in upstate New York, and they turned out a pretty fair felon in the person of Claudius Horseblock Smith. He was leader of an outlaw band and was sometimes called the Cowboy of the Ramapos. The term "cowboy" had no heroic connotations in those days but was applied to marauding bands of Tory roughnecks. During the Revolution, Horseblock Smith ravaged the Hudson Valley, raiding farms, harassing Washington's troops, torturing and murdering and stealing. He was finally captured by a man named Titus and was convicted of high crimes at Goshen,

New York. When he arrived on the gallows he asked for a moment's delay, then sat down on the platform and took off his shoes.

"I just want to prove," Horseblock explained, "that my mother was a liar—she was always sayin' that I'd die with my boots on."

Howey Blankenship, being a citizen of Los Angeles County, drove recklessly back towards Hollywood, jumping the lights, weaving back and forth across the center line and occasionally shrieking obscenities at other motorists who in turn shrieked obscenities at him, as is the sentimental custom among the happy inhabitants of the Town of Our Lady, Queen of Angels of Porciuncula.

Crock Thomas played "dog heavies" in westerns for many years. A dog heavy is a sub-villain, usually chief lieutenant to the top skunk, and his consummate nastiness is established early in the picture by having him kick a dog. Crock Thomas, hated by a whole generation of western movie fans, was in reality a benign and benevolent man, admired and respected by all who worked with him. He loved dogs.

On the day that any actor in a motion picture, particularly an actor in a low-budgeted western picture, delays production for any appreciable length of time, by reason of alcohol, a skull and cross-bones goes opposite his name in the casting books and thereafter he cannot get a job playing a corpse in an Indian massacre. He is somewhat worse off if he tries to kill the head of the studio with an iron skillet.



## NO LUNCH

Al Greene is one of the rare characters of this earth. I worked alongside him for five years and had dinner with him almost every night during that period. In all that time, however, I never had a single luncheon with him. Al Greene does not eat lunch, and for an interesting reason.

"When I was about twenty," he once explained to me, "I worked in the depot at Wichita, Kansas. I was the telegraph operator. Well, it was a pretty good job for a young fella so I got married. Beautiful girl. We took a little bungalow about a mile from the depot and I bought a bicycle.

"At noon each day I got forty-five minutes off for lunch. I'd rush out of the depot, jump on my bicycle, and pedal like mad for home, get there, jump off my bike, and run into the house. Then, with about five minutes to go, I'd come running out, get onto the bike, ride down to the depot, and go back to work. I didn't eat a bite of lunch for a whole year. Got out of the habit, I guess. From that day to this I've never been a lunch eater."



## THE UNKNOWN PHILOSOPHER

Give me the simple philosophers. One of the great ones, to my mind, is a person whose identity is unknown. He wrote but briefly of his beliefs and emotions but he was considerate enough to hand his philosophy on to the public. He chose a steel pillar in the Fourteenth Street station of the I.R.T. subway. Head-high on this pillar he scribbled in pencil: "Nuts to People." Then he faded into the crowd. There was a man with an Idea.



## THE FACTS OF LIFE

When I first found out about the facts of life, particularly as regards the origin of babies, I hurried to Eddie, to let him in on the discovery. An older boy had furnished me with the information and I had it correct as to fundamentals, though a bit confused as to details.

I told Eddie about it and he sat and looked at me a long time, and then he began to blubber. Suddenly he turned to me fiercely and cried:

"That's a lie!"

I didn't know what was going on in his head, but I defended myself, just as other scientists have defended themselves down through the ages.

"You mean," he demanded, "that my mother and father did that?"

"They sure did," I said.

Whereupon he beat hell out of me.



## TEN BEST

The human animal differs from the lesser primates in his passion for lists of Ten Best. We have our ten best-dressed women and our ten best-dressed men. Sloppy dressers of both sexes have their day in the sun, and there are lists devoted to anatomical superiority, such as best lips, best noses, best hair, best shoulders, best lung warts, best elbows, best prats, and best varicose veins. We are assaulted with the Ten Most Beautiful Words, the Ten Best Movies, the Ten Most Exciting Fights in El Morocco, and the Ten Greatest Individuals Who Are Not Known Personally by Elsa Maxwell (maybe it's only five).



## THE HANGOVER

A hangover is the worst infirmity known to man because it excites no feeling of sympathy. Let a man show up for work with the sniffles or a sprained ankle or half his ear bitten off and his bosses and associates are full of solicitude for his well-being. But let him come in with the inside sweats and the feeling that a moose is having a baby in his head and he becomes an object of scorn. The boss punishes him with extra work and his associates creep up behind him and yell "Bool" and otherwise torment him. It is no wonder that, when the sun gets over the yardarm, he heads for the hair of the dog. There is simply no such thing as commiseration for a man with the black-butterfly ague.



## NEWLYWEDS

People who carry their ideas of decency to extraordinary extremes can become downright lascivious in the presence of honeymooners. They roll their eyes at the happy couple and grin and snicker and snort and snuffle in their presence and sometimes even make slightly impolite jokes about them. This seeming rudeness is not rudeness at all, but standard, traditional behavior, and deacons of the church indulge in it as readily as moral lepers. I would put in a strong beef against it save for the fact that the newlyweds usually bring it on themselves and for all I know may actually enjoy it.



## WALKING STEWART

I find in my notes an account of the career of Walking Stewart. Stewart went out to Inja as a clerk but wearied of his work, threw over his job, and walked from Calcutta to France. His idea was simply to get home but now he discovered that he liked to walk, so he walked all over the rest of Europe and then walked all over the United States. After he had covered the greater part of the globe on foot he was interviewed, it being thought that he would have some interesting observations to make on the state of civilization. The reporters pressed him hard, but all he knew was where he had been. He hadn't observed anything, hadn't seen anything unusual, had no thoughts. He hadn't kept notes or a diary. The reporters hammered away at him, insisting that he must have arrived at some conclusions about the state of the world, and finally Walking Stewart spoke: "I think the time will come when ladies of breeding will quit bearing children, and only the poor people will have families." There is a wealth of wisdom in this man's words, which I can't locate.



## INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITY

A woman had just come in from Europe that morning and right away she began talking about international affairs. This is a tradition that has always mystified me, especially since the newspapers themselves encourage it. I have seen ship-news reporters approach a passenger on a ship from Bermuda and question him about developments in Japan as they affect the Suez Canal. An Akron cigar maker saves up his money and goes back to visit his ancestral village on the Continent. He spends a week there, dead drunk, and at last his relatives pour him on the boat. When he reaches New York he becomes an oracle, and his opinions of what is going to happen in the world are broadcast to the nation.



## JOB LOST

One day a man prominent in the theatrical world got in touch with Morton about a job. The theatrical man was going to give him a marvelous job, paying twice the salary he was getting on the newspaper. They arranged to meet in a booth at a quiet restaurant just off Times Square.

This was Morton's great opportunity—the thing he had dreamed about. Here it was, coming true. He sat in the booth, opposite the theatrical man. They had a couple of drinks and then they ordered dinner. Morton got a plate of clam spaghetti. They talked on as they ate and things were going swimmingly. Then something happened. Morton had his mouth full of clam spaghetti. Before he could catch himself, before he could even turn his head, a tremendous paroxysm seized him, his mouth flew open, and he sneezed a mighty sneeze, splattering that theatrical man from chest to scalp with clam spaghetti. The Savior himself wouldn't have hired Morton after that.

